

Administration Practices and Challenges of Multi-Campus Libraries in a Digital Environment: The Experience of Osun State University

Oluwatosin Olubunmi OKUNOYE¹ & Ajibola Sunmade GBOTOSHO²(✉)

^{1,2} Osun State University Library, Osogbo, Osun State Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the administration of Osun State University Library as an academic library that is operated in a multi-campus university. The paper discussed the pattern of administration practices of the library and also the challenges the library has to face in its operation especially in today's digital environment. The myriad of challenges include: breakdown and poor maintenance of ICT infrastructure, irregular e-library services and epileptic power supply, among others which have grossly slowed down developmental progress of the digitization process of the university library, especially with the peculiar nature of each of the college libraries in the University. The paper made some recommendations based on the findings.

Keywords

Administration, Multi-campus, Challenges, Digital environment, ICT, University library

Corresponding Author (✉)

ajibola.gbotosho@uniosun.edu.ng

Osun State University Library,
Osogbo, Osun State Nigeria

© Nigeria Library Association
Enugu State Chapter

Introduction

The academic library is tasked with the responsibility of helping the parent institution to mediate between the world of information and the end users of information in such a way as to ensure that the user gets the needed information at the appropriate time. In the university system the responsibility is more challenging. This is as a result of the multifaceted nature of the university which is the highest educational institution where information needs of diverse users are to be met, on the one hand. On the other hand, the responsibility is challenging for the library system because it is operating in a digital age where technological change is the norm and the library has to follow the trend in order to keep pace and satisfy the technology-inclined user community which cut across teaching and non-teaching staff as well as students. In a multi-campus university system, the situation is not different but the challenge is such that technological innovations and adaptation have to be replicated on every

satellite campus in order to satisfy user needs on an equal footing.

The University Librarian stands at the apex as the academic and administrative head in the university library and undertakes several management roles geared towards achieving specific objectives of the library. The Edwin H. Mookini Library of the University of Hawaii in the USA, highlights the responsibilities of her University Librarian to include: administration of library programs and services; budget planning and administration; organizational planning and coordination; staffing and personnel appraisal; communication with the university community and the general public; participation in library services; and a few other salient activities (University of Hawaii Hilo, 2021). According to Indeed Career Guide (2021), management refers to the coordination and administration of duties in order to achieve a goal. The administrative activities include setting the organization's strategy and coordinating the responsibilities of staff to accomplish these objectives through the application of available resources. Ekoja (2020) highlighted the role

of the university librarians as not just the administrative heads in the library, but also have the professional knowledge to manage it. Hence, university library administrators play the role of managers. University library managers are also assisted by other professional staff who are librarians responsible for important professional duties in the library like Technical division management, Serials management, Collection Development section, E-resources section management and the Readers' Services division. They are also representatives of the University Librarian and are expected to coordinate the day to day activities in their sections of the libraries and college libraries in any part of the university and give feedbacks to the University Librarian as and when due.

The role of managing the modern library is enormous as players must make efforts to ensure that libraries change in response to the changes in their parent institutions and any university's high ranking status is expected to be a reflection of a rich library.

An obvious reflection of what the modern university system should look like therefore is one that adapts to the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The 2015 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit held in New York submitted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will need ICT to meaningfully facilitate the development of human beings and enable the bridging of the digital divide as well as construct knowledge communities. For the university system accessibility to global information is a key factor in bridging the digital divide. Effective deployment of ICT infrastructural facilities in bridging the digital divide is therefore necessary in meeting best practices.

The university library is expected to provide the required ICT infrastructure for information service delivery in a digital environment. However, funding and

expertise needed to invest in some of these provisions remain a great challenge. For Nigerian university libraries to be technologically ready, Akintunde (2021) posited that the library will among other things have enabling ICT infrastructure such as electricity, internet connectivity, and computers with their accessories that will facilitate information service delivery. In a study by the author, 79.2% of Nigerian university libraries claimed that they are internet ready, but only 31.3% of them have 24/7 electricity supply to their libraries. Findings from the study also showed that 75% claimed they have power back-up, which may only be switched on during working hours of the day. The author concluded that to be internet ready, the connectivity should be seamless, electricity should be constant and there is availability of other facilities that can be considered basic infrastructure which also results to a standard digital learning environment. Baker & Ellis (2021) study on the impact of COVID-19 on libraries, showed that physical library space for reading and study as important as they are, are no longer enough without employing very crucial options of off-site working and study, in addition to online access to information. Atkinson (2021) has already predicted that e-delivery of not just lectures is likely to increase in various institutions. Akintunde (2021) study revealed that just 9% of a representative sample of Nigerian undergraduates from 38 institutions could access their libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows a need for Nigerian university libraries to commit more towards the emerging digital environment.

Anyanwu (2020) has highlighted several problems that militate against libraries to include: poor state of the economy, infrastructure problems, inadequate information resources in the library, corruption and lack of skills and expertise among librarians. Sadly several of these challenges have remained. The responsibility for driving a developmental synergy in the

current digital dispensation also lies with the administrative leadership in the university library. The author advocated for provision of infrastructure and embracing ICT, among other remedies for improving library services in Nigeria and other developing countries.

In a developing country like Nigeria, innovation is strategic. This is reflected in the operation of multi-campus university system currently embraced by several universities. Even though this practice is evident in other parts of the world, in Nigeria, one of the reasons for this practice is borne out of the need to decentralize administration to effectively reach and meet the educational needs of various regions and geo-political zones and bringing higher education closer to the grassroots. The challenges to these endeavors however abound.

In Osun State, the government feel more obliged to ensure government presence and therefore makes effort to ensure that every part of the state feel considered as part-owners of the established institutions, especially the state-owned university and indigenes are encouraged to be responsible to it.

Brief History of Osun State University

Following the approval by the National Universities Commission on 21st of December, 2006, Osun State University (UNIOSUN) became the 30th State University and 80th in the Nigerian University system. Osun State University is a conventional university envisioned to be a center of excellence through the provision of highly qualitative teaching and learning experiences which will engender the production of well-rounded entrepreneurial graduates capable of impacting positively on their environments while also being globally competitive. Hence, the mission of UNIOSUN is to create a unique institution committed to the pursuit of academic innovation, skill-based training and a tradition of excellence in teaching and learning, research and community service, a

multi-campus institution operating collegiate system. There are seven colleges in six campuses located in the six geopolitical zones of the state. These are:

1. Osogbo (Main Campus) comprising: College of Health Sciences and College of Science, Engineering and Technology;
2. Okuku Campus comprising: College of Management and Social Sciences;
3. Ikire Campus comprising: College of Humanities and Culture;
4. Ejigbo Campus comprising: College of Agriculture;
5. Ifetedo Campus comprising: College of Law; and
6. Ipetu-Ijesa Campus: College of Education

Osun State University was able to commence local and overseas staff training before the commencement of academic work at inception. Also as a public university, it was able to take off within a year from its permanent sites and is the first university in South-western Nigeria to enjoy planned local government contribution to the funding of the University. In its first three years of existence, UNIOSUN recorded a phenomenal growth in infrastructural development, of all the Universities in Nigeria. According to Okebukola (2010) Osun State University has ranked very highly in terms of international visibility. The multi-campus system of Osun State University was showcased at the world conference on higher Education held in Paris from 4th-9th of July, 2009. The selection of the theme for exhibition was a rigorous process that involved more than four hundred universities in Africa.

Consequently, the establishment of the University has impacted positively on the economic status of the communities where the campuses are sited. The campus sites which were hitherto thick jungles have now became centers of attraction and beehives of

activities, while also engendering telecommunications interconnectivity. UNIOSUN has broken the jinx that three years is too short a time to assess a nation, institution or any human being. The magnitude of physical and academic development that have taken place in all six campuses of the University is the outcome of the dream, political will and commitment of the then visitor and former governor of Osun State, Prince (Dr) Olagunsoye Oyinlola, and the visionary leadership of the council. The positive and enabling environment has been matched by the "We can attitude" that pervaded the mentality of the pioneer and indeed current leadership of the institution. Osun State University experience offers a lesson for those aspiring to positions.

Telecommunications Infrastructure in the University

The university has put in place a centralized internet distribution system. A fiber optics or microwave internet access was envisaged for the whole university to be provided and managed by a single internet service provider. Consideration was given to the peculiar nature of some of the branch campuses of the university which were remotely situated. However, the option of fiber optics was reconsidered when there were challenges on internet facilities on each of the campuses. The microwave connectivity system was adopted using a single internet service provider to make distribution across campuses. The university library is connected to the overall university telecommunications infrastructure that is put in place by the ICT department.

Administration of Osun State University Library as a Multi-campus University Library

Osun State University operates a collegiate system and the library system is decentralized. There is a library in each of the six campuses of the university. The main campus library located in Osogbo, is referred to as the central library and the activities of all the other five satellite campuses earlier highlighted are coordinated from there. The central library also serves as the image of the university library. The physical structure of the library is not only bigger than that of the other college libraries it also has the full complement of all the normal sections and units of a standard library. The general administration of the library is led by the University Librarian and efforts are made to maintain a very good working relationship with other units in the university in order to engender the right prospects for the library. The library has enjoyed meaning university support in the area of staff training and retraining.

The college libraries on the other hand, has the College Librarian and the staff doing most of the work. The library has created a virtual and physical learning environment to support teaching and learning, as well as research in the university. The university library was established simultaneously with all other departments and units of the university at the commencement of operations in the university. The library is run by the University Librarian who oversees the affairs of the library from the main campus library in Osogbo with the assistance of other librarians who are in charge of several sections of the library also in the central library. These sections include: Acquisition, Technical, Readers Services, Circulation and Serials sections. The College Libraries are run by other librarians who are referred to as College Librarians.

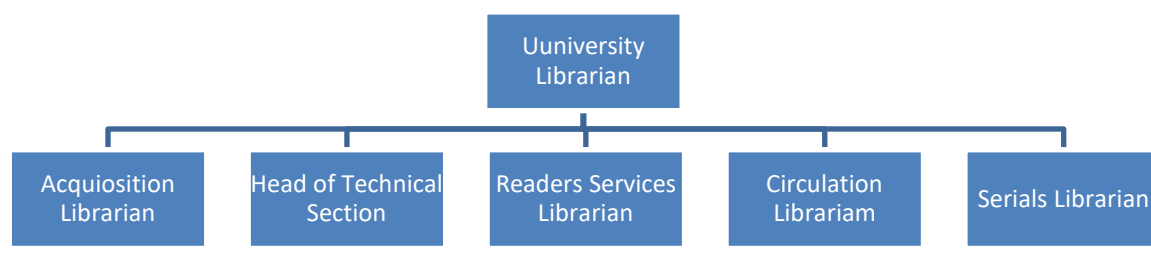


Figure 1: 1: Organization structure of the central library in the main campus

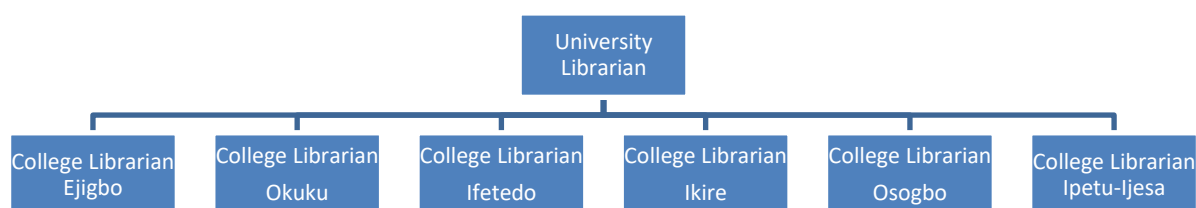


Figure 1: 2: Organization structure of all the libraries in Osun State University

The central library works towards ensuring that all the libraries work together to achieve the mission and vision of the university. As shown in figure 1, the librarians in charge of the sections of the library in the central library report directly to the University Librarian. They also independently carry out routine tasks usually assigned to their section of the library. Each sectional head have at least one support staff, a Library Assistant, attached to their section. However, the central library has a few Library Officers who attend to several duties assigned to them from any of the sections. Duties may also be delegated to the sectional heads, from the University Librarian's office in response to matters that affect college libraries in areas that has to do with their sections of the library. There are also a number of library porters in the central library.

Essentially all the sections in the central library play coordinating roles to ensure that services rendered in the College Libraries are according to library policy standards. The technical section of the library coordinates all matters relating to cataloguing of resources and all other processes for the resources to

be placed on the shelves or released on the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Although each College Library does their own cataloguing and classification of resources, the technical section in the central library is expected to supervise their work and ensure that the processes are in order. The same process is reflected in the acquisition section. However, all lists for book/equipment purchases are sent to the University Librarian who verifies and validates the lists and collaborates with the acquisition section to make necessary purchases. Book purchases on arrival are sent directly to the colleges concerned while other materials and equipment are first sent to the central library for assessment of quality and other considerations.

As shown in figure 2, the College Librarians report directly to the University Librarian on all matters that affect their libraries. The College Librarians are the representatives of the University Librarian in all college meetings, including College Board Meetings, occasions and ceremonies like the matriculation ceremonies that may be held on college basis from time to time. They also

report to their College Provosts on certain matters as deem fit by the University Librarian, but also carry the Provosts along on activities of the library were necessary especially when they need to make crucial inputs. The College Librarians however independently undertake every other routine task assigned to their office. They are also able to take the initiative in attending to many issues without involving the University Librarian except when it may involve finances where they may need the support of the University through the University Librarian. The College Librarians can lobby support from their college when the need arises. They are also encouraged to have a good working relationship with the College Provosts, Deans, Heads of Departments, as well as lecturers generally in order to ensure that the College Library has a good image in the college. This will engender progress for the College Libraries. Each College library has one additional librarian apart from the College Librarian and support staff which may include at least one library officer, one library assistant and one porter.

Osun State University Library has a Systems Analyst who oversees and maintains the ICT infrastructure, including the e-library services of all libraries. Even though the College Library e-libraries are managed by the Librarians there, when in need of technical expertise, the university library Systems Analyst is called upon. The Systems Analyst also works closely with the university ICT department (also called Information Management Technology Centre, IMTC) which is in charge of ICT infrastructure in the university. The Systems Analyst reports directly to the University Librarian. Sectional heads and College Librarians however relate with him directly when they are in need of his services. He reports peculiar cases in any Section or College Library to the University Librarian.

The University Library Development in a Digital Environment

University management recognizes the library as a significant player in its academic affairs and the pivot on which all academic activities revolve. The University management also recognizes that running the institution is better facilitated with the installation and effective deployment of ICT infrastructure in all its units and departments. The library is therefore not left out. College Libraries on all campuses had to be developed simultaneously due to the multi-campus nature of the university. The Library started operations in 2007 with a collection of 520 volumes acquired from different sources including personal donations, gifts from other institutions, purchases from publishers, book agents and vendors. The library has continued to grow her resources. The library also started to develop a virtual library, making subscription to a number of electronic resources including databases in order to make available online journals, books, magazines and other reference and research materials. The e-resources of the library are acquired centrally. In November, 2010, the design of the library's website was already completed, hosted and ready for use. The website has facilities and features that include E-Resources, Library Catalog, College Libraries Home Page, Social Media Plug-In like Face book and Twitter, Link to Uniosun Home Page, Library Staff Login Page, among others. UNIOSUN library currently operates a combination of print and electronic-based resources. The library also has internet connectivity across campuses. Internet connectivity is possible via a "Router" that uses subscription of some internet service providers. Also available are static content of various documents on the Local Area Network in the e-library like the e-granary server. The library has enjoyed previous subscriptions to databases such as: Sage, ScienceDirect, Research4Life, Questia, Springer, Emerald insight, EbscoHost and

LexisNexis. The library currently subscribes to Research4Life, Hein, Jstor, Hinari, Agora, and a few others. There are also the Internet connection-based open access databases some of which are: CORE, Education Resources Information Center, PudMed, Semantic Scholar, Zenodo, JURN, BioMed Central, and others. The university's centralized internet distribution, also include the libraries across campuses. All the college libraries are linked to the internet and are able to provide access to electronic resources. The library had a goal to provide full automation services for its patrons from the onset. Its automated services are however currently provided alongside manual services.

Also, the library started the digitization of its services in the 2009/2010 Session with the purchase and installation of the KOHA Library Management System software and this made the library holdings partially visible and accessible. So far, UNIOSUN library has successfully incorporated the use of a few of the KOHA modules for its services. The library has a website link on the university website: www.uniosun.edu.ng/library. The OPAC is accessible within and outside the campus at <http://opac.uniosun.edu.ng>. Features on the library OPAC include search engines catalog, past questions, free books, e-past questions and so on. The library also has free access to a number of essential journals and other journal resources without the need of internet connection. All university staff including all library staff has institutional email addresses.

Challenges in Administering Osun State University Library as a Multi-campus University Library System in a Digital Environment

The laudable efforts made so far in moving Osun State University up to attaining best practices notwithstanding a number of challenges still subsist. The university library management has endeavored to consistently relate cordially with other university

departments so as to facilitate developmental synergy for the library. This has been the case during the tenure of respective university librarians who tried to improve the fortunes of the library to move it closer to realizing best practices. The university library has also enjoyed funding from TetFund especially in the area of equipment and information resources acquisition. However, myriad of challenges still plaque the library's growth efforts especially because of its multi-campus nature. Some of these major challenges include the following:

Poor funding

Irregular funding in the university system has greatly affected the smooth process of services provision and maintenance of equipment and the library in general. Among these setbacks is the slow pace of the library's digitization process. Acquisitions of books, websites, journals, and so on, in collections such as e-Granary is not cheap. The university being a government-owned institution explains the fact that many capital-intensive projects are subject to the availability of funds.

Towering cost resulting in poor distribution of ICT infrastructural facilities

Funding of ICT infrastructure was generally high for the library. This has also resulted in inadequate distribution of the supplies. Maintenance has also been slow when there is a breakdown of ICT infrastructure. General acquisition is usually made at the main campus library for all equipment acquisition in the library before distribution to college satellite campus libraries.

Poor maintenance of ICT infrastructural

The university library also has problems with breakdown of infrastructure being put in place. The problem sometimes stems from poor maintenance from the central ICT department in the university where their facilities also suffer setback because of pressure and also inadequate funding. The

library official website may also be down. This situation often affects the smooth operation of the university library as users are unable to access available electronic resources online.

Low Internet connectivity

The library suffers from low internet connectivity and slow download rate of the internet. Adequate internet connectivity for all campus libraries remains among major challenges. The inability of Internet Service Providers patronized over the years, to have their infrastructures substantially in all the colleges of the institution is a barrier to effectively deploying library services that are Internet dependent. In such cases, the cost of provision of Internet service becomes very high, often with limited bandwidth options. The institution having considered a failed attempt at using fiber optics options with microwave links. These options were meant to improve the quality of the library services provided across the campuses in order to enhance collaborative learning.

Limited Bandwidth

Centralized distribution system being adopted by the university has resulted in an imbalance and other networking problems. The library has suffered inadequate bandwidth bearing in mind its unique services provision. Even when the bandwidth was increased at bargain prize from a willing internet service provider, it was not yet enough to address the cross campus situation of the university library. The problem of low internet connectivity invariably results in slow access to internet resources as well as limited bandwidth.

Hardware and Software costs

The high cost of computer hardware, with accompanying peripherals, copyrighted software and networking devices like routers and switches have hindered the smooth functioning of the e-libraries of the college libraries. This is especially when they are needed to be provided afresh or replaced

when they are faulty. The storage systems such as hard disks are expensive, especially since information stored on Compact Disks and DVDs cannot be for a long period when compared to hard disks.

Cost-prohibitive subscription to databases

The high-cost of databases subscription has made it difficult for the university to consistently subscribe to a number of good databases. Hence, subscription is made to a few at a time, while awareness campaign for usage of free access databases is usually created among the library patrons.

Irregular e-library services

Already highlighted challenges of low internet connectivity, slow download rate of the internet, limited bandwidth, and limited and slow access to internet resources, all constitute part of the problems leading to irregular e-library services. Some other problems include erratic power supply, and e-library environment inconveniences that is subject to respective campus conditions. Almost all the campuses operate heavily on alternative power supply through the generating set. This means not only a need for regular fuel supply costs but also maintenance cost for the generating sets.

Setback due to damage to KOHA server

Even though the university library information management system, KOHA, started quite early, a year's (2011) damage to the KOHA server caused a major setback and this also led to data loss. This damage was due to electricity fluctuations. On the recommendation of the ICT department, a new replacement was put in place. This occurrence has necessitated careful insistence on regular maintenance and backup especially since the university library still relies heavily on alternative power supply.

Base station problems

Different campuses of the university experience localized networking problems

often not traceable to internet supply even from the supply chain. This problem is however sometimes due to fluctuations in electricity supply or damage and breakdown of infrastructure. The situation therefore will differ from college to the other. Due to bureaucratic problems in the hierarchy of reporting such issues, resolving them may take time.

Epileptic public/government electricity supply

The host town to the main university campus, Osogbo, is a major power supply town in Osun State. Hence, only the main campus of the university enjoys moderate supply of public electricity, with backup of alternative power supply. However, all other satellite campuses of the university rely heavily on alternative power supply.

High cost of maintenance of alternative power supply

While the university is gradually experimenting on adopting other alternative supply of power for institutional operations, it currently relies on generating sets as alternative power supply and this, as said earlier comes with the financial burden of fuel purchases and generating sets maintenance.

Inadequate maintenance and irregular provision of ICT equipment

Library equipment maintenance sometimes suffers setback due to bureaucratic delays in reporting and resolving issues that bother on provision of funds maintenance and purchases bearing in mind that the university library operates a centralized funding system with other university departments. This affects matters as little as replacing cables for connecting PCs to the internet. Other major costs include computers (both desktop and laptops), printers, copier maintenance and so on.

Inadequate manpower

Osun State University has endeavored to encourage periodic library staff training in order to ensure proper human capacity development. However, there is still inadequacy of manpower in the library e-components sections maintenance especially considering the multi-campus nature of the university. This is an area that requires proper attention in order to ensure that the university does not derail in its pursuit of excellence and attaining best practices.

Recommendations

Based on the identified challenges of the study it is thereby recommended that:

1. The University Librarian take advantage of the position as principal officer of the university and step-up more advocacy efforts by way of lobbying for better funding.
2. The University Librarian and College Librarians must recognize the ICT department of the university as a driving force they must not ignore in order to achieve success at establishing a digital library environment. It is important that they relate properly with the ICT director and his assistants at the college level so that attention can be sourced and sustained for the library.
3. Also, there should be employment of competent library staff to manage technology in the library while regular training of existing staff must be given priority in order not to create a set-back on progress already made in building and sustaining a digital library environment.

Conclusion

The ever constantly high expectations in library and information services provision in academic institutions especially the university is not being lowered because information needs of information users will

continue to increase. The digital environment has become an ideal environment to deploy in meeting user needs in university libraries. Multi-campus library administration even when it is meant to help dis-centralize management efforts still comes with its own myriad of challenges. The experience in Osun State University Library has helped to highlight some of these challenges that grossly hinder speedy attainment of best practices especially in a developing country such as Nigeria. This paper therefore concludes that the study may serve as guide where establishment of multi-campus institutional libraries such as Osun State University library may be considered, while this documented case of challenges may be useful for further study.

References

- Adejumo, A. A. (2014). *E-library challenges and prospects in Use of Library*.
- Akintunde, S. A. (2021). The battered library: navigating the future in a new reality. In D. Baker & L. Ellis (Eds.) *Libraries, digital information, and COVID: Practical applications and approaches to challenge and change*, Kidlington, Elsevier, p. 265-280.
- The state of ICTs in Nigerian university libraries. Invited paper presented at the 105th Bi-Annual Conference of Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities. Held at Nigerian Universities Commission, Maitama District Abuja, August 25, 2021. p. 1-17
- Anyanwu, E. U. (2020). The future of libraries in developing countries: the case of Nigeria. *Journal of Library and Information Science*; 8(2); 4-7
- Atkinson, J. (2021). The times they are a-changin': but how fundamentally and rapidly? academic library services post-pandemic. In D. Baker & L. Ellis (Eds.) *Libraries, digital information, and COVID: Practical applications and approaches to challenge and change*, Kidlington, Elsevier, p. 303-315.
- Baker, D. & Ellis, L. (Eds.) (2021a). *Future directions in digital information: predictions, practices, participation*, Kidlington, Elsevier
- Ekoja, I. I. (2020). The place of the university librarian in university administration: the Nigerian perspective. *Nigerian Libraries*; 53(2); 67 – 74
- Indeed career guide available at <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development>
- Okebukola P. (2010) in UNIOSUN News-spring (2010), Osun State University: breaking new frontiers in university education in Nigeria.
- Okiy, R. B. (2010). Globalization and ICT in Academic Libraries in Nigeria: The Way Forward *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 501 <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/501>
- Use of Library and Information Resources (2010). Unpublished manual of Osun State University Library. p. 10.
- University of Hawaii Hilo (2021) University librarian's position description available at <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/hr/http://koha.org/showcase/osun-state-university-library>.