Expanding Roles and Services of Academic Libraries in Achieving Sustainable Development in South Africa

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Abstract

Education, which is addressed by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of the United Nations (UN), is a driving force of nations world-wide. Quality education remains a powerful tool that can be used internationally to entrench socio-economic development. SDGs are particularly significant in enabling poor and developing African countries to work towards achieving these goals by the 2030 target date. In South Africa, the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) should also be achieved by the same date as SDGs. To achieve the SDGs and chapters of the NDP, equitable access to information is critical. Universities have a fundamental role to play in producing knowledgeable and professional PhD graduates of a high standard, who will work productively to boost weak and slow-performing economies in their respective countries. Academic libraries are mandated to support students in completing their studies. They also need to support researchers in producing impact-based research that is crucial in solving the persistent socio-economic challenges that citizens face daily. Based on the literature review, this study was aimed at highlighting the expanding roles and services that academic libraries can embark on in South Africa in achieving SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP. The key recommendation is that universities need to provide academic libraries with an increased budget to enable them to expand their roles and services to ensure that SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP are achieved.

Keywords: South Africa; academic libraries; National Development Plan; impact-based research; Sustainable Development Goals

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Introduction and Background

Sustainable socio-economic development is key for all citizens world-wide to improve their daily lives. This is even more true in poor and developing African countries, which are facing an avalanche of persistent socio-economic challenges such as extreme poverty, illiteracy, inferior-quality education, unemployment and poor economic growth. South Africa is not an exception. Nomlala (2019, 2) states that:

> A sluggish economy, unemployment, poor service delivery and poverty challenges must be overcome to achieve the country's aim of a robust, sustainable and all-inclusive transformation and development agenda. Transformation remains an imperative in South Africa, however, it continues to be marred by persistent socio-economic challenges.

In South Africa, quality education is one of the country's non-negotiable transformation imperatives in the post-apartheid era to produce a skilled workforce essential to boost the weak and slow growing economy, which is unable to create more jobs for the youth.

As information is a crucial enabler for sustainable socio-economic development, equitable access to it in a variety of formats is critical to influence and change people's lives (Iroka and Ndulaka 2018). To achieve all 17 SDGs and 15 chapters of the NDP, seamless access to information is essential. Wyber (2018, 26) reiterates that:

> Access to information is front and centre of the work of libraries. By providing information, libraries support the process of decision making, from the highest international institution to the individual.

Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 516), citing IFLA's Lyon Declaration, state that:

> Public access to information enables people to make informed decisions that can improve their lives. Communities that have access to timely and relevant information for all are better positioned to eradicate poverty and inequality, improve agriculture, provide equality education, and support people's health, culture, research and innovation.

Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 516) further declare that "IFLA advocated for culture, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and access to information to be included in the SDGs." Through the advancement of ICTs globally, instant access to and sharing of information and ideas are possible, facilitating decision making (Fourie and Meyer 2016). The significance of ICTs to provide access to the multifaceted information environment of the 21st century cannot be overemphasised.

Digital infrastructure plays a significant role in ensuring that citizens have access to global electronic information. With a robust digital infrastructure, internet services can be accessible for sustainable development and to benefit the citizens. Besides, students and researchers need access to internet services to access e-resources in diverse formats.

In South Africa, Thomas (2007, 71) states that "the higher education sector and academic libraries did not escape the historical baggage of apartheid and separate development. Apartheid engineered a higher education system separated by race by means of the Extension of University Education Act in 1959, which barred black students from the historically white institutions." Singh (2004, 6) affirms that during the apartheid era, racial discrimination based on skin colour "led to the establishment of separate universities for white and non-white students, which was to become the ultimate realisation of policy that provided inferior education and poor learning opportunities for non-whites."

Owing to the inheritance of apartheid and its oppressive rules, historical disparities in the higher education sector are still visible 26 years into the new political dispensation. During the apartheid era, non-white and white universities received different funding allocations, which resulted in considerable gaps in the provision of resources (Nyahodza and Higgs 2017). Historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs)—such as the universities of the North (now the University of Limpopo), Zululand and Western Cape, which catered only for non-white students—were underfunded and under-resourced to perpetuate inequality and inferior education systems, with disastrous consequences (Mulder 2019; Nyahodza and Higgs 2017).

Even today, the HDIs still have digital infrastructural backlogs that make it difficult for students and lecturers to access reliable broadband internet services. However, Jardali, Ataya, and Fadlallah (2018, 1) avow that "it is acknowledged that think tanks and other institutions involved in the production and communication of knowledge also have an important role in advancing the SDG agenda."

As universities are involved in achieving national and international imperatives, academic libraries have a significant role to play in assisting their countries in achieving the SDGs and the NDP in South Africa. It cannot be business as usual; they need to change their thinking and go beyond their core business to expand their roles and services. Crowster (2019, 3) indicates that libraries have a responsibility to further development agendas, as in the case of the SDGs and the NDP. Academic libraries have a responsibility to ensure that SDGs and NDP agendas are achievable by the 2030 target date. Jardali et al. (2018, 1) posit that:

> Universities are uniquely placed to lead the cross-sectoral implementation of the SDGs, providing an invaluable source of expertise in research and education on all sectors of the SDGs in addition to being widely considered neutral and influential players.

It is indisputable that illiteracy and unemployment, which culminate in abject poverty, remain pressing socio-economic challenges that affect citizens in poor and developing countries. Poor and developing countries with struggling economies lack the muscle to produce more jobs for their youths. Statistics South Africa (2017) states it categorically that youth unemployment is rife in the country, with disastrous consequences such as teenage pregnancy, drug addiction and other criminal activities.

Besides having up-to-date and quality information resources, academic libraries need to have dedicated and professional staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to support their patrons, especially students, to complete their studies. They also need to support researchers in producing impact-based research to mitigate the socio-economic challenges affecting poor citizens in disadvantaged rural communities. Impact-based research is critical for poor and developing countries to provide practical solutions to the persistent and challenging socio-economic challenges that their citizens face daily.

In institutions of higher learning, adequate and quality educational resources are regarded as significant scaffolds for quality teaching and learning (Ezeani et al. 2017). "Academic libraries, as education support services departments, should be positioned to play a democratising and socially equalising role that benefits economically and educationally marginalised students through the provision of technologies and other resources that enable access to electronic information" (Nyahodza and Higgs 2017, 40). The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) (2018, vii) states that:

> A fully functional LIS system can contribute to the goals of the 2030 Vision and a prosperous and inclusive society that enjoys fully the benefits of a democratic and modern economy in the 21st century.

However, the DAC (2018) indicates that South Africa has a backlog of 2 732 public libraries, which implies that most citizens in information-poor environments still lack equitable access to information. The DAC (2018, 67) further indicates that R19 billion is needed to address this immense backlog.

With a dire shortage of public libraries in most disadvantaged rural communities, academic libraries have a vital role to play in assisting poor and developing African countries to achieve the SDGs and the NDP in South Africa. Owing to the effects of the colonial system in Africa, and apartheid rule in South Africa, the provision of quality education in the disadvantaged rural communities remains a worrying factor. Twenty-six years into the new democracy, the education system in South Africa has not fully recovered from the after-effects of the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Owing to the information-poor environments in most disadvantaged rural communities (Strand and Britz 2018), it is a stark statement of reality that many teachers and learners are not avid readers, which has disastrous implications for the entire education system in the country. Because of the lack of adequate educational resources and competent teachers in most South African schools, most learners are unable to meet university entrance requirements to further their education. Raju (2018, 30) reiterates that:

> It is acknowledged that far too many South Africans are trapped in poverty, and South Africa still remains a highly unequal society. A major contributor is the poor quality of kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) education for the majority and the continuation of that into higher education.

Raju (2018, 30) further avers that "the major challenge for the higher education system is that generally from K-12 education is poor, and this has ramifications, such as an increased cost to the state to produce graduates." The inadequate information skills of most first-year students prevent them from completing their studies. Since these students are unable to produce work of the required quality, they need the assistance of the academic librarians in retrieving relevant information sources to pursue their studies. Therefore, academic libraries have a pivotal responsibility to make sure that this cohort of students acquires essential skills to access information and complete their qualifications with the ultimate aim of fighting the challenges their communities are facing.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined to contextualise the study:

Academic Libraries

These are libraries that support teaching, learning, administration and research initiatives at universities and colleges. Their collections need to be diverse, comprehensive and relevant to respond to the curriculum, administrative and research information needs of their patrons. In this study, university libraries are cited as examples of academic libraries. Academic and research libraries in all parts of the world are essential in providing information access to academic communities and promoting SDGs to drive socio-economic development (Garcia-Febo et al. 2017).

SDGs

The SDGs are the set of goals that were developed by the United Nations (UN) and adopted through a UN General Assembly resolution for member states "to build on the many successes of the past 15 years" (UNDP, n.d.). They are a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals. In South Africa, the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012) developed the NDP: 2030 for stakeholders to work towards improving the lives of citizens. SDGs form a cohesive and integrated package of global aspirations that the world commits to achieving by the 2030 target date (Dodds, Laguna-Celis, and Thompson 2014; Dodds, Donoghue, and Roesch 2017). They address the most pressing global challenges of our time, calling upon collaborative partnerships across countries to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, economic growth and environmental sustainability, and also social inclusion (UNDP n.d.).

"An analysis of the SDGs demonstrates the interconnectedness of the goals and targets, with various nexuses identified among sectors, such as education" (Jardali et al. 2018, 1). Although there are 17 SDGs, this study is centred around SDG 4.

SDG 4

SDG 4 deals with the provision of quality education in all sectors of education. It also ensures equal access for men and women to quality and affordable vocational, technical and tertiary education (UNESCO 2017). All formats of resources are indispensable to guarantee quality education. Qualified and dedicated teachers should be employed in all education sectors, including Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, to lay a solid and better foundation for the entire education system. The development needs of children should be prioritised by the ECD centres (NPC 2012). ECD centres need to be well-resourced for learners to develop skills that will assist them when entering the basic education band and then progressing further. For inclusivity, students—including those with physical, visual and auditory challenges—need support from the academic libraries to complete their studies (UNESCO 2017).

NDP

The NDP was developed by the NPC in South Africa to advise the president on issues impacting citizens in the long term (NPC 2012). It is a long-term development plan structured in consultation with South Africans from all spheres of life (Zarenda 2013). The NDP serves as an action plan for securing the future of South Africans, as outlined in the Constitution. It is a roadmap to be achieved by the country by the 2030 target date. The NDP comprises 15 chapters, and this study is centred around Chapter 9, which deals with improving education, training and innovation.

Problem Statement

Sustainable socio-economic development is imperative for the poor and developing African countries to improve the livelihoods of their citizens, which currently remains a pipe dream. The UN General Assembly is aimed at improving the standard of living of people world-wide, including people in poor and developing African countries. As South Africa is a signatory to the UN General Assembly, South Africans need to channel their energy and make coordinated efforts to achieve the SDGs. The SDGs and the NDP are comprehensive and include challenging goals and targets, which require vast resources and capacity enhancement to achieve.

As the quality of education is a worrying factor in South Africa, academic libraries are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in assisting the country to achieve SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP. Academic libraries need to provide expanding roles and services that support teaching, learning and research initiatives in support of SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of NDP for sustainable development. For academic libraries to succeed in supporting South Africa to achieve SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP, they need to have sufficient library resources, well-spelt-out programmes, such as computer literacy, and dedicated professional academic librarians to support teaching, learning and research innovations (IFLA 2012).

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the expanding roles and services that academic libraries can embark on to assist South Africa in achieving SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP. In order to achieve the purpose, the study was guided by the following objectives:

- To investigate the expanding roles and services that academic libraries can embark on to support South Africa in achieving SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

- To examine the challenges relating to the expanding roles and services of academic libraries in support of SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

Research Methodology

This is a conceptual paper and, therefore, a literature review was the selected approach, which is regarded by researchers as a qualitative research approach (Cresswell and Cresswell 2018). Local and international resources, such as articles and books relating to the SGS and NDP, were reviewed to underpin the study.

Literature Review

Academic libraries have a significant role to play in supporting the achievement of SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

Increasing Throughput of Doctoral Students

Academic libraries have a responsibility to support all students academically, including first-year students, to increase throughput at universities. Maluleka and Ngoepe (2018, 1) reiterate that:

> South African universities produce fewer graduates than the number specified in the NDP. According to the NDP, South Africa needs more than 5 000 doctoral students annually, against 1 420 produced in 2010 and 2 258 in 2014. The 2030 target is to produce more than 100 doctorates per million people per year, as the current figures are below international standards.

Raju (2018, 30) affirms that "there is a relatively small number of black students graduating from universities, exacerbating an already unequal society." This is even more true in HDIs that were earmarked for non-white students during the apartheid rule. With adequate resources, academic libraries have the task of organising library orientation workshops for students at all levels to enable them to acquire skills crucial to access and utilise the library resources optimally and to bridge the digital divide.

In South Africa, the NDP aims to increase the number of postgraduate students who complete their doctoral studies to 72% by the year 2030 (NPC 2012). Academics need

to work persistently to meet this tall order and produce competent and skilled doctoral students to increase "a highly knowledgeable workforce" (Maluleka and Ngoepe 2018, 1). Academic librarians also need to support doctoral students to produce acceptable and quality proposals and to support them consistently throughout their projects until completion (Raju 2018). Effective systems and ICTs, such as broadband internet services, are indispensable for university patrons to access information to carry out their research activities. They are also needed to ensure that students receive requested library materials on time. This is even more true for distance education students who study through open and distance e-learning environments, such as at the University of South Africa. The managers and staff of academic libraries need to be strategic and offer effective user education and library orientation programmes to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to access and use library resources optimally. More well-equipped and staffed mobile buses are indispensable to support students residing in remote rural communities with the necessary library resources.

With only 34% of the current academic staff having PhD qualifications, academic libraries have a huge task in supporting students to produce "graduates who can add to the skills pool to assist South Africa to address some of the challenges facing the citizenry" (Makhanya 2019, 2).

Specialised and Professional Academic Library Staff

For academic libraries to serve their users effectively and to meet their multiple and evolving information needs, subject librarians' specialisation cannot be overemphasised. In South Africa, more than 80% of academic librarians have a humanities or social sciences background (Raju 2018). This is even true in the HDIs, where most black staff missed out on the opportunity to study in other streams because of repressive apartheid laws. This cohort of academic librarians lacks the essential skills and knowledge to be effective in retrieving information sources beyond their fields. Therefore, institutions of higher learning need to recruit and train a new cohort of academic librarians from fields such as physical and mathematical sciences, computers, technology and engineering. This would be very useful as students in these fields would then feel confident to request relevant library materials because they would be "speaking the same language" as the academic librarians.

Research Output

Research output is one of the core aspects of all universities. Research, which is a foundation for development, is critical for providing permanent solutions to the multifaceted socio-economic challenges facing citizens. Impact-driven research is, therefore, essential to change people's lives for the better. Universities are mandated to conduct innovative research. However, without equitable access to diverse information sources by researchers, impact-based research will remain a pipe dream.

Academic and research libraries—both independently and in partnership with one another—play a substantial role in providing access to data, research and knowledge that support scholarship, learning and innovation (Garcia-Febo et al. 2017). The NPC (2012, 300) posits that "research and development should be significantly expanded. Collaboration across the South African education system and with internationally accredited institutions should lead to higher levels of innovation." Reliable data are essential for scholars to produce impact-based research. Hence, subscriptions to e-resources such as online databases cannot be overemphasised. The role of the academic library in ensuring seamless access to information in all available formats is critical, as a knowledge system is essential for achieving the transformative UN 2030 Agenda, SDGs and the NDP (Kim and Alenzuela 2016; IFLA 2017).

The main aim of the research is to find enduring solutions to the socio-economic challenges affecting citizens daily. Students and lecturers at universities, therefore, need to conduct impact-based research that is responsive to the challenges facing citizens. Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 517) assert that academic libraries have a huge responsibility in assisting and supporting students and lecturers when they embark on their research projects. Unwavering support should be given to them throughout the entire research process. Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 517) stress that "they [academic libraries] provide access to a multitude of resources, teach how to use them, manage data, and provide research output and preservation, so its value is amplified and of benefit to society."

Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 518) stress that robust digital infrastructure is crucial for the research community to access online information sources globally and to encourage information sharing and innovation. Miller (2015) posits that facilitation by academic libraries in accessing quality and scholarly materials to underpin research activities of students and lecturers cannot be overemphasised. The Committee of Higher Education Libraries of South Africa (CHELSA) 2017) states that:

> Libraries in higher education and those attached to research institutions provide services to researchers supporting scholarship resulting in knowledge production and innovation. Evidence from CHELSA shows that South African universities that invest more per capita in their university libraries produce more research outputs and enjoy high global rankings.

Open Access to Research Materials

It is incontestable that students and lecturers need to have equitable access to research publications. Academic libraries need to provide "access to core and peer-reviewed journals and a number of bibliographic, citation and factual databases in different disciplines from a large number of publishers and aggregators to its member institutions" (Garcia-Febo et al. 2017, 518). Unfortunately, the subscription system currently practised by publishers or vendors world-wide restricts potential researchers, particularly those from information-poor environments from accessing information to increase research output. Raju (2018, 31–32) avows that the concept of open access "is

conceptualised within the ambit of the redistribution of resources to improve the situation of the disadvantaged. It is a lived concept that encompasses acts of fairness, equality and justness towards others." Open access means that publishers or vendors need to do away with the notion of tolling to access the publications, as those who cannot afford to subscribe are denied the right to access information. Raju (2018, 32) further avers that "limited access to scholarly content negatively impacts on research production as information is necessary for the generation of the new knowledge."

Creation of Study Spaces for Student Parents

Owing to the side-lining of women during the apartheid era in South Africa, they need to be educated for empowerment and development. One of the factors that deter them from being educated is their role in bearing and raising children. It is a reality that the majority of female students at universities world-wide are mothers. Carliner and Everall (2019, 100) posit that 4,8 million undergraduate students in the United States are mothers raising children. In poor and developing African countries, the number of undergraduate students raising children may be even higher. Students who are mothers, therefore, need explicit support from the institutions of higher learning so that they can continue with their studies after giving birth. Carliner and Everall (2019, 100) state that:

> If academic libraries are sincere about commitment to equity and inclusion, they must become more accessible for student parents—a large and underserved population whose members may also have other marginalised identities. Given that the burden of childcare primarily falls to women, lack of academic library support for parenting students disproportionately impacts women and has a negative effect on equitable access to library resources and services, as well as overall learning and research opportunities.

As South Africa is not immune to the issue of student parents, family-friendly study spaces closer to academic libraries are needed to cater for the children of the parenting students. Academic libraries have a role to play in establishing rooms to cater for the children of parenting students visiting academic libraries. Carliner and Everall (2019, 100) mention that:

> In Canada, some universities have activity packs or child-friendly resources that children can use while their parents study.

Through their institutions, academic libraries could also hire facilities closer to the academic libraries and appoint caregivers specifically to take care of the children while their parents are studying and utilising the library resources.

Partnership Approaches in the LIS Sector and Quality of Education

In his article, Spaull (2015, 34) explains how "low-quality education becomes a poverty trap" in South African dysfunctional schools with resource constraints. It is a reality that the quality of education in South Africa remains a worrying factor, as the majority of public schools in the basic education band operate without well-equipped and functional

school libraries. Poor learner outcomes in dysfunctional schools are a clear indication that resources are essential to improve the quality of education (Spaull 2015). Therefore, it is unrealistic to talk about the notion of quality education without the provision of and access to adequate resources managed by professionally qualified staff in all schools. "Quality of education needs to improve across all levels if we want a competent and skilled workforce that cannot only help the economy grow, but also address unemployment" (Mulder 2019, 12).

As teachers and learners need access to internet services, academic libraries in partnership with their respective institutions could allow teachers and learners to access internet services for curriculum-related activities. Teachers and learners could also be allowed by the academic libraries to use their own mobile devices, such as laptops and cellphones, to access information through WiFi (Chowdhury and Koya 2017).

With considerable backlogs in the provision of school and public libraries in South Africa, ecosystem approaches are encouraged among various LIS sectors to address the information needs of the users, irrespective of the type of LIS (Mojapelo and Dube 2016). Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 517) posit that:

> Academic and research libraries in all parts of the world are essential in providing information access to academic communities, and promoting SDGs to drive development along with all types of libraries. They can partner with civil society groups, local government, and other libraries to establish joint initiatives.

Jardali et al. (2018, 2) stress that "the centrality of university-led partnerships with governments and communities to achieve the SDGs" cannot be overemphasised. Garcia-Febo et al. (2017, 517) state that "universities are working to strengthen their global competencies and collaborations with diverse partners." Academic libraries, therefore, need to be strategic and proactive and, through their tentacles, forge ecosystem approaches with other LIS sectors and government-based services such as multipurpose centres, to put the information needs of the citizens first, irrespective of the historical distinctions between users. With only a few public schools with well-resourced and functional library facilities, it is encouraging to learn that some academic libraries in South Africa have initiated ecosystem approaches to enhance the provision of quality education. Ramahuta (2007, 24) indicates that:

> Library facilities occupy a prominent place in the learner's learning process and form an essential part of support services. Most schools in the Mankweng area do not have library facilities. Learners depend on the library services of the University of Limpopo. Due to a large number of learners, only a limited number is catered for.

If the idea of ecosystem initiatives could be cascaded to academic libraries of other universities, teachers and learners in poor schools without libraries could be given a chance to access educational resources to promote the notion of quality education. A conducive reading and learning space could also be provided for the teachers and

learners from poor schools, without extra reading materials such as newspapers and magazines. Academic libraries in South Africa need to work together to develop a national consortium or cooperative initiative for resource-sharing. However, Thomas (2007, 81) states that:

> There are only a few and limited examples of successful cooperative initiatives and programmes and between institutions. Many of the features of apartheid fragmentation continue within the system and between the institutions.

Adopt-a-School Campaign

Academic libraries need to adopt schools in their vicinity to facilitate access to information sources. Schools could also benefit by being given weeded materials from academic libraries. Academic librarians could also teach information literacy skills to teacher-librarians in the adopted schools, who could then cascade these skills to their learners.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is a concept that encapsulates acquiring further education throughout the life of an individual, that is, from birth to death (NPC, 2012). Owing to poor and inferior-quality education associated with the Bantu Education System in South Africa prior to 1994, the majority of black adults need training to acquire knowledge and skills to improve their lives (UNESCO 2017).

With the majority of South African citizens lacking a Grade 12 certificate, lifelong learning programmes are critical to equip them with knowledge and skills to better their lives. Lifelong learning activities, therefore, need to be encouraged to ensure that citizens continue learning throughout their life. This is even more true for post-matric learners who cannot go to institutions of higher learning to further their studies because of various circumstances. However, the acquisition of knowledge and skills remains critical for people to get jobs and to contribute to the economy.

Academic libraries have a pivotal role to play in promoting lifelong learning initiatives. Academic libraries and their associated institutions in partnership with private-sector companies, could provide platforms to train and workshop unemployed youth to make them marketable and employable. Computer and literacy workshops and programmes, reference interviews and services could be organised by the academic libraries to equip youths with skills for the workplace. Certificates and other rewards could also be given to competent individuals. In addition, youths could be taught how to write a curriculum vitae that would impress potential employers. This could improve youths' opportunities for finding employment and breaking the poverty cycle that is so common in many families.

ECD Centres

A solid educational foundation starts with children in ECD centres (Bhardwaj, Sambu, and Jamieson 2017). Universities and their academic libraries need to work hand in glove with ECD centres to develop long-term teaching and learning strategies that can be used to teach children in this phase. Qualified and professional ECD staff have a pivotal role to play in this education band. Academic libraries can also assist ECD staff when purchasing educational resources and toys for these children. On the other hand, universities, together with their libraries, can assist in training and capacitating staff of ECD centres.

Inclusive Education

Academic libraries have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the information needs of students with all types of disabilities are met (UN 2015; UNESCO 2017). Library buildings need to have ramps to allow students who use wheelchairs to access the buildings and the resources to meet their information needs. Lifts can also facilitate the movement of blind students. Academic libraries need to have diverse information resources in varying formats, such as reading resources in Braille and large fonts, augmentative communication devices and hearing aids, to meet the information needs of a diverse student body with visual and auditory challenges (Ezeani et al. 2017). Academic libraries also need to employ staff with visual, physical and auditory challenges so that they can better understand students with the same challenges. They also need to employ sign language specialists for students with auditory challenges.

Challenges Faced by Academic Libraries in Relation to Expanding their Roles and Services in Support of SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP

Inadequate Funding

An adequate budget is essential for academic libraries to embark on the journey of expanding their roles and services. However, CHELSA (2017) indicates that:

> All university LIS have had to contend with budgetary cutbacks. At the same time, they are confronted with high annual increases in the costs of databases, licenses and scholarly journals, on average 10% per year. Their annual budgets cannot keep pace, with the result that they have had to cut back on their book purchases.

Without an increased budget, it is futile for academic libraries to expand their roles and services. Sufficient funds are essential to buy information resources for all categories of users. Extensions of library buildings are needed to provide rooms or spaces for children of student parents. Facilities outside universities can also be hired to cater for the children of the student parents when visiting academic libraries. This may have substantial financial implications. Additional funds are also needed to employ supplementary or specialised staff members in academic libraries to expand their roles and services.

Lack of Staff Training

For an academic library to be of service to the users, continual staff training is critical so that librarians can cope with the latest developments and trends in the organisation and retrieval of information from the ICTs. Funds are also needed to ensure that the librarians attend workshops to serve the users better (CHELSA 2017).

Lack of Partnerships or Collaborative initiatives

No library is self-sufficient. It is, therefore, crucial for all libraries in South Africa to work together to form partnerships. The sole aim of these partnerships should be to serve the information needs of multiple users (Raubenheimer 2000).

Lack of Support for Library Projects

Library projects need to be supported by the universities for successful completion. Adequate funds and dedicated librarians are equally needed to roll out academic library projects to the students and citizens (CHELSA 2017).

Summary

Equitable access to information is indispensable for South Africans to work towards achieving the SDGs and the NDP. Owing to the inadequacy of LIS in South Africa, academic libraries have a role to play in facilitating the attainment of SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP. They need to expand their roles and services to meet international and national imperatives. Financial resources are essential for academic libraries to meet the expanding roles and services. Equally, human resources are also vital for academic libraries to fulfil their expanded roles and services.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

- Academic libraries need to go the extra mile with their roles and services to support students and researchers, so that the universities can produce knowledgeable and professional graduates and impact-based research to mitigate the pressing socio-economic challenges, such as inferior-quality education, poverty and unemployment, which have engulfed South Africa.

- Academic libraries need to create study spaces specifically for student-parents. This will encourage the notion of women empowerment.

- Universities need to provide their academic libraries with an adequate budget to fund library projects and programmes such as computer literacy programmes to assist students in attaining SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

- Publishers need to do away with the notion of the subscription system, thereby encouraging open access to the research materials.

- Academic libraries also need to forge partnerships with government departments, other academic libraries and local communities to work towards achieving SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP in South Africa.

- To ensure inclusive education, the academic libraries in collaboration with their parent institutions need to forge relationships with organisations for people with physical, auditory, visual and other challenges to understand their information needs and to provide resources to meet them.

- Universities need to provide lucrative incentives to stimulate researchers to produce high-impact research to improve the lives of citizens.

Areas for Further Studies

The study suggests the following areas for further studies:

- Library projects and programmes which academic libraries can embark on to assist South Africa to achieve the SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

- ICTs as scaffolds in assisting South Africa to achieve SDG 4 and Chapter 9 of the NDP.

- Role of the higher institutions of learning in supporting student-parents in South Africa.

Conclusion

Given adequate information resources and professionally qualified librarians, academic libraries have a significant role to play in assisting South Africa in achieving SDG 4 and chapter 9 of the NDP. An adequate budget is vital for academic libraries to meet their expanded roles and services.

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