


Chapter 1

Integrating Wikipedia in the Information Service Space: The WikiAflib Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examined the input and output of WikiAfLibs training, the struggles, and lessons learned. The study used spidergram design of 5Ws and 1H (who, what, where, why, when, and how). Instruments used were online questionnaire and FGD. The participants were librarians in the #WikiAfLibs Cohort 1 drawn from Anglophone countries. It was discovered that live sessions, office hours, and learning resources were mostly favored among the activities (39% and 33%, respectively). Respondents used personal data subscriptions (75%) and received the training from their homes. Some have joined Wikipedia communities in their countries and have received funds. They struggled with cost of data subscription, fear of internet disruption, and not meeting the deadline of the assignments. They agreed that Wikipedia would give librarians more visibility, enrich services, and build partnerships. The findings imply that librarians' full embrace of Wikipedia will add value to information services. The study concluded that librarians should integrate Wikipedia in information service delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

Librarians' roles in information services have changed with technologies. The fact that societies transform with a new era and vision makes it imperative that every forward-looking professional adopts the new narratives to fit into the new system. One of the new narratives and services is the Wikipedia. For years Wikipedia has been there while many people seem to view it as their "thing", thereby distancing themselves from getting involved. That was the scenario until more knowledge and significance on its spread to warrant acknowledgment by the information stakeholders. The turning point caused a surge in the library world with IFLA, AfLIA and other associations advocating for learning more of the digital platform (IFLA, 2014). However, because of the sophistication of technology and the savvy information society, it becomes necessary that librarians are equipped with knowledge and skills to understand Wikipedia for effective facilitation, promotion of quality education, access to the resource and serving user communities all over Africa (AfLIA, 2020).

Importantly, Wikipedia is an open-access encyclopedia that allows free input and edit from every contributor. The free editing imbues knowledge of the masses, making it freely available to the Internet audience (Synder, 2013). Librarians are trained to have eyes for information, especially the type that adds value to everyone. So, they need skills, facilitation, training, guides and every resource that point to the end output of becoming the best in retrieving whatever they need to reach out to their users. There is no mystery in searching and retrieval, the requirements are to develop the right mindset, being disposed of for new learning and savoring it all to apply the knowledge. After all, a professional in the new order is a teacher of all and a master of all information platforms. The whole idea is to ensure that Librarians do not stay off the front line of innovative information knowledge and services.

Information is a serious business. This is the reason it changes with the trend and society to add value to everyone at the same time. It creates, integrates, innovates and strategizes for better services as more people are now getting into Wikipedia every day for curiosity with their electronic devices. This must be the reason LaFrance (2016) stated that as web traffic shifts toward mobile, a new study finds Wikipedia remains the most popular informational site around. The Librarians cannot stay out of the corridor of the powerful engine of information navigation. They need to be part of the active human resource that facilitates, dictates and creates the modern services as well as bring their users into the inclusive platform. Thus, librarians need to embrace the use of Wikipedia as an information resource to be a step higher than their users who have become exploratory and excited with the new narrative.

Undeniably, Wikipedia has been attuned with many negative remarks right from its inception. It's being free online encyclopedia has made a glasshouse to attract lots of attention and unsolicited statements. Probably, this must be the reason researchers stay away from citing it, faculties advise their students and members to avoid it like plague. Again, there seem to be challenges of the digital competency among the librarians in the current information services. Many professionals are still grappling with new technologies as well as including their users in harnessing cultural heritage information. This is the reason collaborations are initiated to train librarians, especially Africans to take charge of information sectors, step out and facilitate the information in all sectors. As information is very critical in sustainable development and library services, the major stakeholders in African Librarianship delved into the intricacies of collaborations and negotiations into bringing the Librarians in the technical know-how of dissecting and using Wikipedia in information services.

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