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THE CATALYST JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Vol 4(2), December, 2025

ISSN:2971-7094

<https://iournals.iournalsplace.org/index.php/CJLIL>

ROLE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN ENHANCING OPEN KNOWLEDGE, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY, AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA.

Ngozi Ogechukwu Nwogwugwu, PhD, CLN

Confucius Institute Library

ogenwogwugwu@yahoo.com

Jane Eze Onwuzuluke

Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library

Je.onwuzulike@unizik.edu.ng

and

Enuma Maureen Azolo

Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Anambra State, Nigeria

azomour@gmail.com

Abstract

The interaction between open knowledge, civic education, democracy, and good governance is fundamental to socio-political development. University libraries serve as crucial facilitators in promoting these elements by providing unrestricted access to credible information resources. This study examined the role of university libraries in South-East Nigeria in enhancing open knowledge, promoting citizenship education, supporting democratic principles, and fostering good governance. The study adopted a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of university librarians. The population comprised all the 60 librarians in the ten public university libraries in South-East Nigeria. The sample size consisted of 60 librarians selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify key insights and challenges. University libraries significantly enhance open knowledge through institutional repositories and collaborations with open-access initiatives. However, poor digital infrastructure, and copyright restrictions hinder access. Libraries promote civic education and democratic values by providing resources on governance, human rights, and citizenship responsibilities, yet low student engagement and lack of curriculum integration limit effectiveness. Furthermore, libraries curate credible information, counter misinformation, and promote political literacy, though censorship, limited digital literacy, and funding constraints remain challenges. In conclusion, libraries support good governance by providing access to research materials and policy documents, but outdated resources and weak collaboration with policymakers reduce their impact. University libraries are essential in fostering informed citizenship, democracy, and good governance. It was recommended amongst others that university librarians should integrate

information literacy and civic education modules into compulsory courses and orientation programs; make library workshops credit-bearing where feasible.

Keywords: University libraries, Open knowledge, Citizenship education, Democracy, Good governance.

Introduction

University libraries in Nigeria have evolved significantly since the establishment of the country's first higher education institution, the University of Ibadan, in 1948. The primary function of university libraries is to provide academic and research support to students, faculty, and the broader academic community (Akidi, Umebali & Imeremba, 2025). Over the years, the expansion of higher education institutions has led to a corresponding increase in university libraries, ensuring access to diverse information resources. These libraries play a crucial role in knowledge dissemination, research advancement, and intellectual development. According to Furfuri (2025), the structure of university libraries in Nigeria follows global best practices, integrating traditional and digital resources to facilitate learning and research.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is a global organization that sets standards and guidelines for libraries worldwide. IFLA emphasizes the role of university libraries in supporting education, research, and community engagement. Key roles include: (i) supporting Education and Lifelong Learning: University libraries provide access to textbooks, journals, and digital materials, fostering lifelong learning for students, faculty, and the broader community; (ii) Facilitating Research and Innovation: Libraries support research by offering scholarly resources, databases, and tools, while promoting open access to enhance the visibility and impact of academic work. They also provide services like reference assistance and research data management; (iii) promoting Information Literacy: Libraries develop information literacy skills through workshops, enabling individuals to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively for academic success and informed decision-making; (iv) preserving Cultural and Intellectual Heritage: Libraries act as custodians of rare books, manuscripts, and institutional records, using digitization and conservation to ensure accessibility for future generations; (v) fostering Inclusivity and Equity: Libraries promote equitable access to information, catering to diverse populations, including persons with disabilities, marginalized groups, and international students (IFLA, 2019).

The National Universities Commission (NUC), which regulates university education in Nigeria, mandates that university libraries must meet specific standards in collection development, accessibility, and service delivery to enhance knowledge acquisition and application. These libraries have transitioned from conventional book repositories to dynamic centers of open knowledge, fostering citizenship education, democracy, and good governance. This transformation underscores the evolving role of university libraries as catalysts for intellectual empowerment and societal progress. As they move beyond traditional functions, these libraries are actively embracing digital innovations to foster inclusive and unrestricted access to knowledge.

Open knowledge refers to freely accessible, reusable, and shareable information resources that contribute to intellectual and societal growth. University libraries in Nigeria have embraced the open knowledge movement by providing digital repositories, open-access journals, and electronic databases that facilitate unrestricted knowledge acquisition (Idakwo, 2022). One of the key strategies is the deployment of digital repositories and open-access platforms. These repositories, such as institutional archives and online

libraries, allow students, researchers, and policymakers to access scholarly articles, government reports, and educational resources. Platforms like the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) and the Nigerian Virtual Library facilitate unrestricted access to academic materials, ensuring that credible knowledge is not limited to privileged individuals but is available to all stakeholders (Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020). Furthermore, university libraries have adopted information literacy programs that equip users with the skills to locate, evaluate, and apply information effectively. These programs, often integrated into library orientations and workshops, enhance critical thinking and research competencies among students and faculty members (Adewoyin, Onuoha & Ikonne, 2017). By fostering digital literacy, university libraries ensure that individuals can navigate vast information resources and make informed decisions, a crucial aspect of participatory governance. Additionally, partnerships with international open-access initiatives, such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and HINARI (Health Internetwork Access to Research Initiative), enable Nigerian university libraries to provide access to high-quality research materials. These collaborations enhance knowledge dissemination on governance, policy-making, and civic education, thus equipping the populace with insights into democratic processes (Omotade & Akinola, 2025).

Citizenship education involves instilling in individuals the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in civic life. University libraries in South-East Nigeria play a pivotal role in fostering citizenship education by creating resources that focus on governance, civic rights, national development, and political participation. Through structured reading programs, workshops, and public lectures, these libraries create awareness on fundamental human rights, duties, and responsibilities. According to Nwokocha and Chimah (2018), university libraries provide access to government publications, legislative documents, and policy frameworks, enabling students and scholars to engage with national issues critically. This information access is vital in a democratic society, where citizens must be well-informed to contribute meaningfully to governance processes. Additionally, university libraries collaborate with civil society organizations and governmental bodies to organize civic education initiatives, thereby empowering students to become responsible citizens.

Democracy thrives on transparency, accountability, and informed citizenry. University libraries play a crucial role in sustaining democratic principles by providing access to unbiased information that enables citizens to make informed decisions. The availability of credible news sources, historical records, and policy analyses in university libraries helps prevent misinformation and promotes fact-based political engagement (Ifijeh & Iwu-James, 2020). In South-East Nigeria, university libraries serve as platforms for democratic discourse by hosting debates, town hall meetings, and public forums on national and regional governance issues. These engagements encourage critical thinking and active participation among students and community members. Additionally, university libraries offer resources on electoral processes, governance structures, and constitutional rights, equipping individuals with the knowledge needed to engage meaningfully in democratic activities. According to Saka, Ahmed and Akor (2021), digital transformation has further enhanced the role of university libraries in democracy by enabling access to e-governance platforms and online civic engagement tools. Through these technological advancements, citizens can interact with government agencies, participate in policy discussions, and hold public officials accountable. University libraries, therefore, act as bridges between academic institutions and democratic governance, fostering a politically conscious and participatory society.

Good governance entails efficient public administration, rule of law, and participatory decision-making. University libraries contribute to these governance ideals by supporting research that informs public policy and administrative practices. By providing access to empirical studies, statistical data, and best practices

from other countries, university libraries enable policymakers, scholars, and public officials to formulate effective governance strategies (Olorundare, Olowe & Olorundare, 2022). In addition to supporting research, university libraries serve as accountability hubs where citizens can access information on government expenditures, development projects, and policy evaluations. Transparency in governance is enhanced when university libraries facilitate access to public records, enabling stakeholders to track government performance and advocate for policy improvements.

The transition to digital repositories, open-access journals, and electronic databases has been instrumental in knowledge dissemination. Institutions such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture have embraced open knowledge platforms, enabling wider accessibility of academic resources. The Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) and the Nigerian Virtual Library serve as major infrastructures that support digital knowledge-sharing initiatives. Through these platforms, university libraries help bridge the information gap and promote intellectual development (Imo, Okorie & Nwizu, 2024). Additionally, university libraries in the region have integrated information literacy programs that empower students and the public to navigate and evaluate information critically. This initiative has enhanced democratic participation by equipping citizens with knowledge on governance, human rights, and civic responsibilities (Eze, 2021).

Ifijeh and Iwu-James (2020) in their study revealed that libraries that provide institutional repositories, open-access journals, and electronic databases significantly increase knowledge accessibility among students, researchers, and policymakers. They emphasized that digital access to scholarly materials enhances research productivity and contributes to national development. Eze (2021) remarked further that students who engaged with library resources on governance were better informed about civic duties and more likely to participate in democratic processes, including elections and policy debates.

However, despite these advancements, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor digital infrastructure, limited awareness of open access resources, and restrictive policies on information dissemination hinder the full realization of open knowledge and its impact on governance and democracy in South-East Nigeria (Okon, 2019). The American Library Association (ALA) highlights issues like the banning of materials with LGBTQ+ themes, restrictions on internet access due to legislation like the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), and financial limitations that impede the acquisition of diverse resources. These challenges restrict the free flow of information and limit the libraries' ability to serve as open knowledge hubs. Yap, Barat and Kiszl (2024) emphasized that while libraries equip learners with information literacy skills, there is a need to focus more on preparing citizens for active civic participation. However, libraries often lack the necessary resources and institutional support to implement comprehensive civic education programs, limiting their impact on fostering informed and engaged citizens. Despite these challenges, there is a need to critically examine the role of university libraries in enhancing open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and good governance in South-East Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The present reality suggests that university libraries in South-East Nigeria are facing significant challenges that hinder their ability to fully perform their functions. Many of these libraries suffer from inadequate funding, outdated resources, and limited access to digital technologies. The absence of strong open-access policies restricts the free flow of information, preventing students and researchers from accessing relevant and up-to-date academic materials. Additionally, infrastructural deficiencies such as poor internet connectivity and irregular power supply further may limit the role of libraries in advancing open knowledge and digital scholarship. In institutions like Nnamdi Azikiwe University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Michael Okpara University, access to up-to-date and freely available research materials appears a major

issue. While these universities have established digital repositories, their content is often limited, outdated, or inaccessible due to poor internet infrastructure.

Moreover, preliminary investigations gathered revealed that institutions in South East Nigeria, there may be no well-structured programmes within the libraries that actively engage students in citizenship education, governance discussions, or democratic debates. Unlike libraries in some developed countries where public lectures, seminars, and reading clubs on governance and democracy are common, these universities appear to lack such initiatives. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of libraries in democratic societies, there may be limited empirical research on how university libraries in South-East Nigeria are contributing to open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and governance. Existing studies on university libraries in Nigeria primarily focus on their role in academic research and information literacy but often overlook their potential in civic education and democratic participation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate role of university librarians in enhancing open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and good governance in South-East, Nigeria. Specifically, this study sought to:

- i..examine the role of university libraries in enhancing open knowledge by providing unrestricted access to information resources in South-East Nigeria.
- ii..determine how university libraries contribute to citizenship education by promoting awareness of civic rights, responsibilities, and national development.
- iii.ascertain the impact of university libraries on democratic principles through their role in facilitating public access to credible information and fostering informed decision-making.
- iv.find out the contribution of university libraries to good governance by assessing how they support research, transparency, and accountability in public institutions.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of university libraries in enhancing open knowledge by providing unrestricted access to information resources in South-East Nigeria?
2. How do university libraries contribute to citizenship education by promoting awareness of civic rights, responsibilities, and national development?
3. What impact do university libraries have on democratic principles through their role in facilitating public access to credible information and fostering informed decision-making?
4. How do university libraries contribute to good governance by supporting research, transparency, and accountability in public institutions?

Theoretical Underpinning

Access to Information Theory

The Access to Information Theory (AIT), propounded by McCreadie and Rice (1999), emphasizes that equitable and unrestricted access to information is a prerequisite for knowledge creation, empowerment, and societal development. The theory argues that when individuals and institutions have free and reliable access to information resources, they are better equipped to make informed decisions, participate in governance, and contribute meaningfully to social and economic growth. Access to information, therefore, serves as both a human right and a driver of transparency and innovation. In the context of university libraries, the Access to Information Theory provides a strong basis for understanding their role as gateways to open knowledge. By providing digital databases, open educational resources (OERs), and institutional repositories, university libraries enable students, researchers, and the public to access knowledge without

barriers. This unrestricted access promotes learning, research advancement, and information literacy core elements of open knowledge dissemination.

Furthermore, the theory aligns with the libraries' role in citizenship education, as access to information enhances civic awareness and encourages individuals to understand their rights and responsibilities. Through reliable and diverse information sources, libraries help shape informed citizens who can critically engage with national issues. Likewise, in promoting democracy and good governance, university libraries, guided by the principles of AIT, provide transparency tools such as access to government data, policy documents, and research outputs, which foster accountability and informed public discourse.

Democratic Participation Theory

The Democratic Participation Theory (DPT), articulated by scholars such as Dahl (1989) and Habermas (1984), postulates that democracy thrives when citizens are informed, engaged, and empowered to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. The theory asserts that information is the foundation of democracy, as it enables citizens to hold leaders accountable, evaluate policies, and make rational political choices. Without access to credible information, democratic participation becomes weak and governance loses legitimacy. Applying this theory to the role of university libraries, DPT highlights how libraries contribute to democracy and good governance by ensuring equitable access to accurate and unbiased information. Libraries serve as neutral information hubs that promote civic engagement, debate, and awareness of social and political issues. By organizing public lectures, exhibitions, and awareness programs, university libraries stimulate civic consciousness and strengthen democratic values among students and the larger community.

In relation to citizenship education, the Democratic Participation Theory explains how information literacy programs within university libraries equip individuals with the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to understand their civic duties and rights. Similarly, by facilitating open knowledge, libraries support an informed society capable of constructive participation in governance and public affairs. Therefore, Democratic Participation Theory supports the present study by explaining how access to credible information through university libraries promotes democratic values, civic responsibility, and accountable governance.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the role of university libraries in promoting open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and good governance. The choice of a qualitative design allows for an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and challenges associated with university libraries in South-East Nigeria. A phenomenological approach is suitable because it focuses on the lived experiences of university librarians, faculty members, students, and policymakers concerning library services and their impact on governance and civic participation. The population of this study comprised all the 60 university librarians in the ten public universities in South East Nigeria. The sample size is 60 university librarians. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 60 university librarians in the six federal universities in South East Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 university librarians from each of the six institutions, making a total of 60 respondents that participated in the study.

The primary instrument for data collection was semi-structured interviews to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives in detail. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the university librarians. The interview guide covered themes related to open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and governance. The data collected from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis,

which is suitable for identifying patterns, themes, and key insights within qualitative data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach:

Familiarization with data – Transcribing interviews and FGDs, reading and re-reading the data.

Generating initial codes – Identifying key phrases and recurring concepts related to the research objectives.

Searching for themes – Grouping similar codes into broad themes such as “open access barriers,” “library role in civic engagement,” and “challenges in governance-related research.”

Reviewing themes – Refining and consolidating themes to ensure they accurately reflect participants' views.

Defining and naming themes – Assigning meaningful labels to themes and sub-themes.

Producing the report – Interpreting findings and linking them to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

Results

Step 1: Familiarization with data

The data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with university librarians from selected universities in South-East Nigeria, including Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN), and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndifur-Alike, and Federal University of Technology, Owerri. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times to identify patterns and common responses.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

After transcribing the interviews, recurring phrases and concepts were extracted. Some key codes identified include:

Limited funding for digital resources

Barriers to open access materials

Librarians as facilitators of civic literacy

Misinformation and challenges in democracy education

University libraries as research hubs for policy formulation

Step 3: Searching for themes

The identified codes were grouped into broader themes corresponding to the research questions.

Theme 1: University libraries and open knowledge access

Digital infrastructure and open access: University librarians highlighted challenges in providing unrestricted access to scholarly materials due to limited subscriptions to open-access databases. Many libraries rely on institutional repositories to provide locally generated research outputs.

Barriers to information access: Interviews pointed out high costs of journal subscriptions, lack of stable internet connectivity, and copyright restrictions as significant barriers to unrestricted knowledge dissemination.

Library role in knowledge equity: Some libraries have partnerships with open-access initiatives (e.g., HINARI, AGORA) to provide free access to scientific materials, but coverage remains inadequate.

Theme 2: Libraries as drivers of citizenship education

Promotion of civic rights and responsibilities: University librarians reported that their institutions organize workshops, lectures, and book exhibitions on civic duties, democracy, and national development.

Challenges in citizenship education: Some librarians expressed concerns about low student engagement in citizenship-focused programs due to lack of interest or curriculum integration.

Role of digital libraries in civic engagement: Online resources and electronic databases are increasingly being used to provide students with materials on governance, human rights, and social justice.

Theme 3: Impact of university libraries on democracy

Libraries as guardians of credible information: Librarians emphasized their role in countering misinformation and fake news by providing verified academic sources.

Encouraging informed decision-making: Libraries play a crucial role in facilitating political literacy by providing resources on election processes, constitutional rights, and governance structures.

Barriers to democratic information access: Respondents identified censorship, limited digital literacy, and inadequate funding as key obstacles to the effective dissemination of democratic materials.

Theme 4: Contribution of libraries to good governance

Support for research and policy development: University libraries serve as research hubs where students and policymakers access credible data for public policy analysis, government accountability, and economic planning.

Promoting transparency and accountability: Some libraries are actively involved in digitizing government records and legislative archives, allowing the public to scrutinize governance processes.

Challenges in governance-related research: The lack of up-to-date local policy documents and limited access to government white papers was a recurring concern among librarians.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

After initial categorization, themes were refined to ensure they accurately reflected the views of respondents. Some overlapping themes were merged (e.g., “Digital Libraries and Civic Engagement” was integrated into “Libraries as Drivers of Citizenship Education”).

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

The finalized themes were:

1. Barriers and opportunities in open knowledge access
2. Libraries as catalysts for citizenship awareness
3. Facilitating democratic knowledge and decision-making
4. Enhancing governance through research and transparency

Step 6: Producing the report

The results indicated that while university libraries play a crucial role in promoting open knowledge, civic education, democracy, and good governance, challenges such as limited funding, low digital literacy, and access restrictions hinder their effectiveness.

Policy recommendations include increased government investment in digital libraries, institutional partnerships with open-access platforms, and curriculum integration of citizenship education resources.

Theoretical implications: The findings align with information literacy and democratic theory, emphasizing that access to credible information is essential for an informed citizenry and effective governance.

Discussion of findings

Barriers and opportunities in open knowledge access

The study revealed that university libraries in South-East Nigeria play a significant role in enhancing open knowledge, primarily through institutional repositories and collaborations with open-access initiatives. However, challenges such as limited funding, poor digital infrastructure, and copyright restrictions hinder unrestricted access to scholarly resources. This finding agreed that Udo-Okon and Akpan (2024) found that

university libraries in Nigeria struggle with limited access to digital academic resources due to high subscription costs and poor internet connectivity. Akidi et al. (2025) emphasized that African university libraries often face copyright and licensing barriers, making it difficult to provide free academic materials to users. On the contrary, Ojukwu (2019) argued that some Nigerian university libraries have successfully adopted open-source digital repositories to bridge the knowledge gap, particularly in science and technology fields.

Libraries as catalysts for citizenship awareness

University libraries were found to play a key role in promoting civic education, democratic values, and national development by providing resources on governance, human rights, and citizenship responsibilities. However, low student engagement and lack of integration into the university curriculum hinder effective dissemination. This finding agreed with that of Okon, Bassey, Edidiong, and Jato (2023) reported that university libraries in Nigeria have designed civic education programs through seminars and book exhibitions, but these efforts often lack active student participation. Conversely, Imo, Okorie and Nwizu (2024) remarked that many Nigerian university students rarely use library resources for civic education because they perceive these materials as outdated or unrelated to their fields of study.

Facilitating democratic knowledge and decision-making

The study found that university libraries contribute to democracy by curating credible information, countering misinformation, and promoting political literacy. However, censorship, limited digital literacy, and inadequate funding were identified as obstacles to effective dissemination. Thindwa, Chawinga and Dube (2019) found out that university libraries in Africa play a critical role in preserving democratic values by making legislative documents and electoral guidelines accessible. Omotade and Akinola (2025) found that misinformation remains a major threat in democratic societies, and libraries are crucial in promoting verified sources and fact-checking tools.

Enhancing governance through research and transparency

The study identified that university libraries support good governance by providing access to research materials, policy documents, and digital government archives. However, a lack of updated materials and limited collaboration with policymakers weakens their impact. Agina-Obu and Okwu (2023) found that university libraries in Nigeria contribute to transparency by providing access to policy briefs and governance research. Yunhee Shim and Shagun (2024) argued that digital archives of government documents in university libraries enhance public scrutiny and accountability in governance.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the role of university libraries in South-East Nigeria in enhancing open knowledge, citizenship education, democracy, and good governance. The findings underscore that these libraries serve as essential gateways to unrestricted knowledge, equipping students, researchers, and the public with credible information that fosters academic growth, civic awareness, political engagement, and policy transparency. However, the study also reveals that barriers such as inadequate funding, poor digital infrastructure, limited integration into academic curricula, and weak collaborations with policymakers hinder libraries from fully achieving their potential. Despite these challenges, university libraries remain powerful institutions for knowledge democratization and civic empowerment. With the right investment, policy reforms, and innovative strategies, they can become pillars of national development, equipping citizens with the information necessary for informed decision-making and effective governance participation.

Recommendations

1. University library management and university administrations in South East Nigeria should establish a copyright/licensing unit within the library to manage permissions, explore Creative Commons options, and train staff on legal strategies to expand access.
2. University librarians should integrate information literacy and civic education modules into compulsory courses and orientation programs; make library workshops credit-bearing where feasible.
3. University library management in South East Nigeria should seek partnerships with NGOs and civic tech groups to co-fund digital literacy interventions and rapid response fact-checking initiatives.
4. University research offices should build a monitoring-and-evaluation framework to track usage, citation, and policy impact of library-held governance materials; report findings to university leadership and funders.

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