# The Role of Libraries in Supporting Lifelong Learning and Continuous Education

**\*Mary Taiwo Ikubaje[1] & Sophia V. Adeyeye[2]**
ikubajemary2020@gmail.com[1], adeyeye.sophia@lcu.edu.ng[2]
Department of Information Management,
Lead City University, Ibadan

Email address of \*corresponding author:
owojuyigbem@run.edu.ng

**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the pivotal role of libraries in fostering lifelong learning and continuous education, emphasising their transformation from traditional repositories of books to dynamic learning environments. Libraries are essential educational institutions that provide diverse resources, services, and programs tailored to meet the evolving needs of learners across all age groups. The research identifies key mechanisms through which libraries facilitate self-directed learning and professional development, highlighting their contributions to literacy, cultural enrichment, and community engagement. Despite their recognized importance, a significant gap exists in empirical research analysing the specific pathways through which libraries support lifelong learning. The study employs a descriptive design focused on library users in southwest Nigeria. Findings reveal that a substantial proportion of users (65%) are aged 18-35, indicating the library's critical role in supporting young adults' educational journeys. High satisfaction rates with book lending and staff assistance underscore the effectiveness of library resources; however, challenges such as limited technological access and outdated materials persist. This research provide access to additional learning programs, and other formal and virtual teaching aids and also contributes valuable insights into libraries' strategic role in promoting continuous education and highlights the need for further empirical studies to strengthen understanding of libraries' contributions to lifelong learning in the digital age.

**Keywords**: Libraries, Lifelong Learning, Continuous Education, Self-Directed Learning, Professional Development

**INTRODUCTION**

Libraries have been acknowledged as part of civilisation fulfilment as a centre for achieving education objectives. Due to globalisation and advancements in computer technology, their task of encouraging people to learn and pursue education at any time in their lives has become more important than ever. It has been established that libraries are fundamental education institutions that offer learning opportunities in the extended sense of the term to people of all ages by providing them with information, resources, and educational services (Bates, 2016; Padhi&Sona, 2018). Libraries are essential in ensuring literacy, education, and the enhancement of different cultures (Abumandour, (2021); Padhi&Sona, 2018). Libraries have expanded in their roles from being storerooms of books to becoming knowledgeable resources. Technology has received a boost from them, along with support for diversity and promoting learning as a lifelong process. Thus, it does not currently reduce libraries to passive knowledge repositories but is an active enabler and a promoter of education at any period of a person's life.

The development idea introduced new opportunities for realising the Library's mission to provide learners with a lifelong education. The library has expanded its services to provide various learning experiences, including workshops, lectures, educative tools, online learning, and other interactive learning means. These services afford endless means for updating one's education and human capital from birth to death. Nonetheless, while libraries' role in lifelong learning has been acknowledged, scarce research has been devoted to examining the profiles of this contribution and the pathways through which libraries foster continuous education (Padhi&Sona, 2018). This ironic situation reveals the research gap that works like the present one must fill: an analysis of the role of libraries in providing lifelong learning and continuing education. The library has a significant purpose of fostering the continuous process of learning and education at all stages of life, particularly within the context of the increased proliferation of digital technologies. However, there is still the scope of conducting more empirical research to establish their roles effectively and how they unlock the opportunities for perpetuity in education. This research was devised to address this knowledge gap and add to prior publications focusing on the topic.

**Statement of the Problem**

Lifelong learning is increasingly recognised as a fundamental component of personal, social, and professional development in a knowledge-based society. It encompasses the continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout an individual's life, enabling adaptability in a rapidly changing world (European Commission, 2020). The relevance of lifelong learning lies in its ability to empower individuals to remain active contributors to society, enhance employability, and improve overall quality of life (Candy, 2002). As global challenges such as technological disruption, labour market shifts, and social inequalities intensify, fostering lifelong learning has become a strategic priority for building resilient and inclusive communities (UNESCO, 2016).

Libraries, often termed the "people's university," are vital educational institutions that provide equitable access to information, learning resources, and developmental opportunities. They play a critical role in promoting literacy, supporting formal and informal education, and facilitating cultural and social engagement (Bates, 2016). With the advent of digital technologies and evolving educational needs, libraries are transitioning into community learning hubs, offering skill-building workshops, digital literacy programs, and lifelong learning initiatives (Ashikuzzaman, 2023; 2024). Despite this transformation, there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining the effectiveness of libraries in sustaining lifelong learning and supporting self-directed education.

Although libraries are acknowledged for their potential to nurture a learning society, existing literature has not sufficiently explored how they actively contribute to continuous education among diverse populations (Abumandour, 2021). While many libraries provide access to digital and print resources, internet services, and community-focused educational programs, the impact of these offerings on adult education and lifelong learning engagement is under-documented. This lack of research limits the ability of policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to fully recognise and leverage libraries as central actors in lifelong learning frameworks.

The core problem, therefore, lies in the insufficient understanding and evaluation of libraries' roles in lifelong learning and continuous education. If this issue is not addressed, libraries may continue to be underutilised in educational planning and policy development, leading to missed opportunities for fostering inclusive and accessible learning environments. This could further

exacerbate educational inequalities and impede the creation of a knowledge-driven society where individuals can continuously learn and adapt throughout their lives.

This research aims to bridge this gap by investigating how libraries facilitate lifelong learning and continuous education. Through an in-depth analysis of library programs, services, and resources, the study seeks to generate insights into how these institutions function as foundational platforms for self-regulated, informal, and professional learning across different age groups and communities.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. to assess the role of libraries in promoting and sustaining lifelong learning.
2. to identify the library resources and services supporting continuous education.
3. toascertain the role of libraries in contributing to continuous education.
4. to identify the challenges libraries faced in providing continuous education and strategies to overcome them.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What roles do librarians play in providing and sustaining lifelong learning?
2. What resources and services do libraries provide to foster continuous education?
3. How do libraries contribute to continuous education?
4. What are the challenges libraries faced in providing continuous education and what strategies can be implemented to address them?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Libraries have evolved from mere repositories of books and information to dynamic learning spaces that facilitate lifelong learning and continuous education.This transformation aligns withsocio-cultural learning theory, which posits that learning emerges from social interactions and is supported by cultural tools such as language (Wang 2011). Within this framework, libraries function as societal structures where individuals engage in territorial interaction to enhance their knowledge. By fostering social learning, libraries create an environment where learners interact with information resources, collaborate with peers, and refine their cognitive abilities, hallmarks of both lifelong learning and continuous education.

The role of libraries in education is well-documented in academic literature. Traditionally, libraries were seen as institutional archives, but contemporary perspectives recognise them as active learning spaces that support not only academic goals but also continuous educational development. Wang (2011) argues that libraries serve as environments where learners not only access information but also engage in various cognitive and social activities, such as group discussions and collaborative learning. This perspective aligns with the new school of library science, which introduces the concept of "learning libraries." Here, faculty members direct students to library resources, reinforcing the role of libraries in academic success, lifelong learning, and continuous education by encouraging the sustained acquisition of knowledge and skills beyond formal schooling.

Beyond academic settings, libraries support lifelong learning and continuous education by providing access to diverse resources that cater to learners at different stages of their educational journey. According to the Commission of the European Communities (2001) and Sadiat(2024), libraries play a crucial role in enabling individuals to pursue self-directed and continuous learning by offering a wide range of educational materials and services. These resources empower users to acquire new skills, update their knowledge, and adapt to the evolving demands of modern society.

Despite their vital role, libraries in Nigeria, particularly in the southwest region, face several challenges that hinder their ability to effectively support lifelong learning and continuous education. Poor funding, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of skilled personnel have been identified as major impediments to library operations (Friday &Chinwe2023; Abang, ETIM, Odey, &Odey, 2025; Kalyani, 2024;). These limitations restrict the scope and quality of services libraries can offer, thereby weakening their contribution to the development of a robust culture of continuous education.

Scholars have proposed several solutions to address these challenges and reinforce the educational function of libraries. Vaidya(2018),and Moonasar (2024) recommend increased funding to enhance library resources, infrastructure, and technologies that support lifelong and continuous learning. Additionally, constructing new libraries and rehabilitating existing ones are essential to expanding access to information and educational opportunities. Oshowole (2024) underscores the need to train library personnel in modern information management and

pedagogy to ensure they can meet the evolving needs of learners engaging in continuous education.

Learning theories, particularly constructivist theories, provide valuable insights into the role of libraries in lifelong and continuous learning. Constructivism posits that learning is an active process through which individuals build knowledge based on experience and reflection (McLeod 2024). In contrast to passive information consumption, constructivist learning encourages engagement, exploration, and application, principles that are deeply embedded in continuous education.

From this constructivist viewpoint, libraries are not simply information storage spaces, but interactive environments where individuals engage with knowledge resources, conduct research, and develop cognitive skills. These processes foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, skills essential for continuous learning in a rapidly changing world. Fleming (2021) notes that while constructivist principles are increasingly discussed in library and information science, more empirical research is needed to investigate their practical application in real-world library settings that promote continuous education.

Globally, libraries function as intermediate learning spaces that bridge formal education with informal and non-formal learning environments. They encourage collaboration, critical inquiry, and the construction of new knowledge, all of which are aligned with the goals of continuing and continuous education. In the digital era, where access to timely and relevant information is critical, libraries play a crucial role in supporting learners' personal and professional development over the long term.

However, challenges persist in fully embedding constructivist learning approaches and technology-driven services into library operations. More research is necessary to explore how libraries can more effectively enhance lifelong learning and continuous education through innovative programs, digital tools, and inclusive strategies. Viewing libraries through a socio-cultural lens further strengthens their position as facilitators of continuous education, highlighting the significance of social interaction, cultural context, and community engagement in the learning process.

In conclusion, libraries are foundational to promoting lifelong learning and continuous education. They do this by providing access to diverse information resources, facilitating

collaborative and reflective learning, and cultivating critical thinking. While libraries in Nigeria, particularly in the southwest, face substantial operational challenges, strategic interventions such as increased funding, infrastructural development, and workforce training can greatly improve their capacity to meet educational needs. Applying socio-cultural and constructivist theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how libraries can be leveraged as inclusive, adaptable learning environments. Future efforts should focus on exploring innovative approaches that allow libraries to meet the evolving demands of learners engaged in continuous education across all stages of life.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive research designto examine the role of libraries in supporting lifelong learning and continuous education. The study focuses on the southwest region of Nigeria, where libraries serve as critical knowledge centres for students, educators, and lifelong learners.

This study's target population consists of library users and employees in the southwest region of Nigeria. It focuses on individuals actively engaging with library services, including students, educators, professionals, and library staff. Given that the total population is 300, the study will adopt a total enumeration sampling technique, whereby all members of the population are included in the research. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives and enhances the validity of the findings. The use of total enumeration is appropriate, particularly for relatively small populations, and is supported by research design principles outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2022). Primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire to capture demographic information, library usage patterns, satisfaction levels, and perceptions of library services in supporting lifelong learning. The questionnaire will include closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain quantitative and qualitative insights. The collected data will be analysed using descriptive statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores will summarise the responses and provide an overview of participants' engagement with library resources.

**RESULTS**

**Demographic Analysis**

The demographic analysis indicates that most respondents (65%) fall within the age bracket of 18–35 years, a key demographic for lifelong learning and continuous education. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 50% female and 45% male respondents. A significant portion of participants (75%) had attained tertiary or postgraduate education, reinforcing the relevance of library resources in advanced learning. Participation from individuals under 18 and over 55 was low (10%), limiting the generalisability of the findings to those age groups.

**RQ 1:** What roles do librarians play in providing and sustaining lifelong learning?

1. **Table:** Roles of Librarians in Lifelong Learning

| Role of Librarians | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|
| Provide guidance in accessing resources | 78% |
| Facilitate user education and orientations | 66% |
| Organise workshops and training sessions | 54% |
| Promote reading culture | 60% |
| Encourage information literacy | 70% |

1. **Summary of the Table:** The table reveals that the majority of respondents recognised librarians' key role in providing access to resources (78%) and promoting information literacy (70%). Over half indicated that librarians organise workshops (54%) and foster a reading culture (60%), demonstrating a multi-dimensional role in lifelong learning.

2. **Result:** Librarians play a significant role in sustaining lifelong learning by providing access to knowledge, organising educational programs, and enhancing information literacy. These functions are consistent with the goals of continuous education and reflect active professional engagement in supporting user learning needs.

**Research Question 2:** What resources and services do libraries provide to foster continuous education?

1. **Table:** Resources and Services Available

| Library Service/Resource | Mean Score |
|---|---|
| Book Lending Services | 4.2 |
| Staff Assistance | 4.3 |
| Computer/Internet Access | 3.5 |
| Books and Journals | 4.5 |
| Research Support Services | 4.3 |
| Library Environment | 4.0 |

2. **Summary of the Table:** Books and journals (M = 4.5), staff assistance (M = 4.3), and research support (M = 4.3) scored highest in contributing to continuous education. Computer and internet access received the lowest score (M = 3.5), indicating technological gaps.

3. **Result:** Libraries provide a range of resources, particularly printed materials and human support, that effectively support continuous education. However, digital infrastructure remains a weak point, limiting broader access to online educational tools and content.

**RQ 3:** How do libraries contribute to continuous education?

1. **Table:** Perceived Contribution of Libraries

| Contribution Areas | Mean Score |
|---|---|
| Fostering educational goals | 4.4 |

| Contribution Areas | Mean Score |
|---|---|
| Enhancing learning outcomes | 4.3 |
| Support for professional development | 4.1 |
| Encouraging independent learning | 4.2 |
| Providing access to up-to-date info | 4.0 |

 

i. **Summary of the Table:** Respondents strongly agreed that libraries foster educational goals (M = 4.4) and positively impact learning (M = 4.3). Encouragement of independent learning and professional development also received favourable ratings.

ii. **Result:** Libraries contribute meaningfully to continuous education by creating an environment conducive to personal growth, academic achievement, and independent knowledge acquisition. These findings confirm the library's relevance in modern, lifelong educational frameworks.

**RQ 4:** What are the challenges that libraries face in providing continuous education and what strategies can be implemented to address them?

1. **Table:** Challenges and Suggested Strategies

| Challenges | Percentage (%) | Suggested Strategies |
|---|---|---|
| Limited resources | 30% | Increased funding, resource expansion |
| Poor internet connectivity | 25% | Improve ICT infrastructure |
| Outdated study materials | 20% | Update book collections regularly |
| Inadequate study space | 15% | Expand facilities and seating arrangements |
| Shortage of trained staff | 10% | Capacity building and continuous staff training |

2. **Summary of the Table:** Key challenges include limited resources (30%), poor internet connectivity (25%), and outdated materials (20%). Respondents proposed strategic improvements such as upgrading infrastructure, increasing funding, and staff training.

3. **Result:** The most pressing obstacles affecting continuous education include infrastructural deficits and limited technological support. Addressing these issues through funding, facility upgrades, and staff development is critical to maximising libraries' impact on lifelong learning.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role libraries play in facilitating lifelong learning and continuous education, particularly for young adults. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of library users (65%) were between 18–35 years old, suggesting that this age group perceives libraries as essential for educational and professional development. This supports Bates (2016), who noted the centrality of libraries in the academic and intellectual growth of young adults. However, the minimal representation from individuals below 18 and above 55 (10%) highlights a demographic gap. This indicates a need for libraries to adopt more inclusive strategies, aligning with Padhiand Sona's (2018) recommendation that libraries should serve users across all age groups in their lifelong learning initiatives.

Library usage patterns further affirm the institution's educational function, with 80% of respondents utilising libraries for studying and 60% for book referencing. These findings resonate with Sadiat(2024), who asserts that libraries are integral to promoting self-directed learning and skill enhancement. However, the 10% of respondents who reported never using library services indicate underlying challenges related to access or awareness. This reflects Abumandour, (2021)concerns about barriers such as inconvenient locations, restrictive operating hours, and lack of user-focused outreach, factors that must be addressed to boost library participation.

User satisfaction data provides additional insight into the effectiveness of library services. High mean scores for book lending (4.2) and staff assistance (4.3) suggest that traditional library services remain vital in supporting user needs. This supports Wang (2011), who emphasized that accessible resources and knowledgeable staff are essential for enhancing user satisfaction and

learning outcomes. In contrast, the low rating for computer and internet access (3.5) indicates a persistent deficiency in technological infrastructure. This echoes earlier studies by (Friday &Chinwe2023), which highlighted underfunding and outdated ICT facilities as significant limitations within Nigerian libraries. Addressing this gap is crucial, particularly as digital literacy becomes increasingly important in modern education.

In terms of educational impact, libraries were rated highly for fostering learning goals (M = 4.4) and positively influencing learning outcomes (M = 4.3). These findings are consistent with Ashikuzzaman (2023, 2024), who argued that libraries are evolving into dynamic learning spaces by offering workshops, digital resources, and research support. Nevertheless, the slightly lower score for the learning environment (M = 4.0) points to specific areas for enhancement, such as improving study space conditions, noise control, and access to modern learning tools.

Challenges identified in the study, including limited resources (30%), poor internet connectivity (25%), and outdated materials, are not new. These issues align with the observations of Abang, ETIM, Odey, &Odey, (2025), who documented the struggles of under-resourced Nigerian libraries in meeting contemporary user demands. The prevalence of poor internet access also corroborates findings by Kalyani (2024), who emphasised the need for improved digital infrastructure to support 21st-century learning.

These outcomes can be interpreted through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the learner's active role in constructing knowledge (McLeod, 2024). Libraries that foster self-directed learning, provide digital tools, and encourage collaborative knowledge building embody constructivist principles. However, as Fleming (2021) observed, more empirical work is needed to evaluate how libraries practically implement these educational theories and meet evolving learner expectations.

To address the challenges highlighted by this study, libraries must focus on facility expansion, upgrading technological resources, and securing sustainable funding. This aligns with Vaidya (2018) and Moonasar (2024), who advocated for financial investment in libraries as a pathway to national educational development. Additionally, extending library hours and launching targeted outreach programmes for underrepresented age groups could promote inclusivity and broaden user engagement.

In conclusion, this study affirms that libraries in Southwest Nigeria play a significant role in promoting lifelong learning and continuous education. However, to maximise their impact, these institutions must evolve by addressing infrastructural challenges, broadening their demographic appeal, and embracing a learner-centred, digitally inclusive approach to service delivery.

## CONCLUSION

The study has provided valuable and rich knowledge that has advanced existing knowledge and provided rich recommendations for future practice and research.

The study reaffirms that libraries play a crucial role in promoting lifelong learning and continuous education by providing essential resources and services. However, challenges such as limited technological access, outdated materials, and inadequate study spaces must be addressed to optimize their impact. Future research should explore the integration of advanced digital learning tools and innovative library service models to enhance the effectiveness of libraries in lifelong learning. By implementing strategic improvements, libraries can better serve diverse populations and continue to be vital educational institutions in the digital age.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that various libraries increase resources and service delivery to provide for lifelong learning and continuing education.

Firstly, this could involve providing access to additional learning programs, training sessions, and other formal and virtual teaching aids. The results, therefore, encourage instructors in the teaching-learning process and the need to include library resources as tools in the practice. Due to the project, teachers applied to libraries to design lessons that incorporate library materials more often. Regarding the policymakers, the above research findings will depict that the libraries have to be funded as the core promoters of the concept of continuing education and learning.

Secondly, the study also has implications for research, some of which are considered for further research. There is a need for more research regarding the qualitative role played by libraries and, more so, the process by which libraries foster lifelong learning. Additional research may also consider how digitisation influences the functions of libraries in learning throughout one's lifespan and other forms of continual education. This is why theorists and researchers have lately relocated the emphasis on researching the chances libraries afford to learners.

Finally, this work contributes to the discussion of scholarly research and analysis, focusing on the library's place in learning across life and in further education. They carry significant implications pertinent to scholars, LIS experts, practitioners, and policymakers. There is a need to conduct more research on this topic so as to make understanding of the relationship between library and information science discipline and this topic easier.

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