

Repositioning Academic Libraries for Research Excellence and Sustainable Community Engagement in Developing Context

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries are recognized as strategic partners in advancing research excellence, facilitating knowledge generation, and promoting sustainable community engagement within higher education systems. The rapidly changing knowledge landscape, characterized by digital transformation, open science, and changing user expectations, , research data management, artificial intelligence has challenged traditional library models, particularly in developing contexts where infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate funding, and limited technological capacity continue to constrain service delivery. This conceptual paper examines the imperative for repositioning academic libraries to enhance their contributions to research excellence and sustainable community engagement in developing countries. Drawing on contemporary literature and emerging global trends in librarianship, this paper synthesizes existing knowledge on the evolving roles of academic libraries as facilitators of scholarly communication, research support, digital scholarship, innovation, and social inclusion. The paper argues that repositioning academic libraries requires a paradigm shift from conventional collection-centered services to dynamic, user-centered, technology-enabled, and partnership-driven service models capable of supporting institutional research agendas and addressing societal needs. Furthermore, the paper highlights the strategic importance of digital transformation, open access initiatives, institutional repositories, research data services, information literacy, community partnerships, and sustainable policy frameworks in enhancing the relevance and impact of academic libraries. The paper concludes that sustainable repositioning of academic libraries demands coordinated investments in infrastructure, human capacity development, policy innovation, collaborative networks, and institutional commitment. It proposes a conceptual framework for transforming academic libraries into resilient knowledge ecosystems that simultaneously promote research excellence and sustainable community engagement in developing contexts.

KEYWORDS: Academic libraries, Research excellence, Community engagement, Digital transformation and Knowledge generation

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge economy has fundamentally transformed the role of universities from traditional teaching institutions into globally competitive centres of research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and societal transformation. Within this evolving higher education landscape, academic libraries have become increasingly recognized as strategic partners in facilitating knowledge creation, supporting evidence-based research, and strengthening universities' contributions to national and global development. The relevance of academic libraries mentioned by society (Soledad et al., 2024, Cox & Brewster, 2024) is no longer measured solely by the size of their collections but by their capacity to create enabling environments that foster research excellence, enhance scholarly productivity, facilitate digital scholarship, and promote meaningful engagement between universities and

Worldwide, higher education institutions are experiencing unprecedented transformation driven by rapid technological innovation, digital scholarship, artificial intelligence, open science, research data management, and evolving scholarly communication systems. These developments have fundamentally altered the expectations placed upon academic libraries, requiring them to transition from passive repositories of information resources to active facilitators of knowledge production, research collaboration, innovation, and sustainable development (Garoufallou & Gaitanou, 2023). Contemporary academic libraries are now expected to provide sophisticated research support services, manage institutional repositories, facilitate research data stewardship, promote open access publishing, strengthen bibliometric services, and enhance researchers' visibility within the global scholarly ecosystem.

Despite these global transformations, many academic libraries in developing contexts continue to operate under significant structural and operational constraints that limit their ability to respond effectively to emerging research and societal demands. Persistent challenges including inadequate funding, insufficient technological infrastructure, limited digital competencies, weak policy implementation, shortage of skilled personnel, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate investment in research support services continue to undermine the strategic contributions of academic libraries to institutional research productivity and community development Sulaiman et al., (2025). These limitations have widened the gap between the evolving expectations of academic libraries and their actual capacity to support research excellence and sustainable societal impact.

Research excellence has become one of the most important indicators of institutional competitiveness within contemporary higher education. Universities are increasingly assessed using research productivity, citation impact, innovation outputs, international collaboration, research visibility, and societal relevance. IFLA (2024) reported that achieving these indicators requires robust research support systems in which academic libraries play indispensable roles through the provision of quality information resources, digital research infrastructures, research consultation services, scholarly communication support, research data management, information literacy instruction, and bibliometric analysis. Consequently, the effectiveness of academic libraries directly influences institutional research capacity and global academic competitiveness. Beyond supporting research productivity, academic libraries have assumed broader responsibilities in promoting sustainable community engagement. Modern universities are increasingly expected to generate knowledge that addresses complex societal challenges while contributing to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNESCO (2023) added that academic libraries facilitate inclusive access to knowledge, digital literacy, lifelong learning, public education, cultural

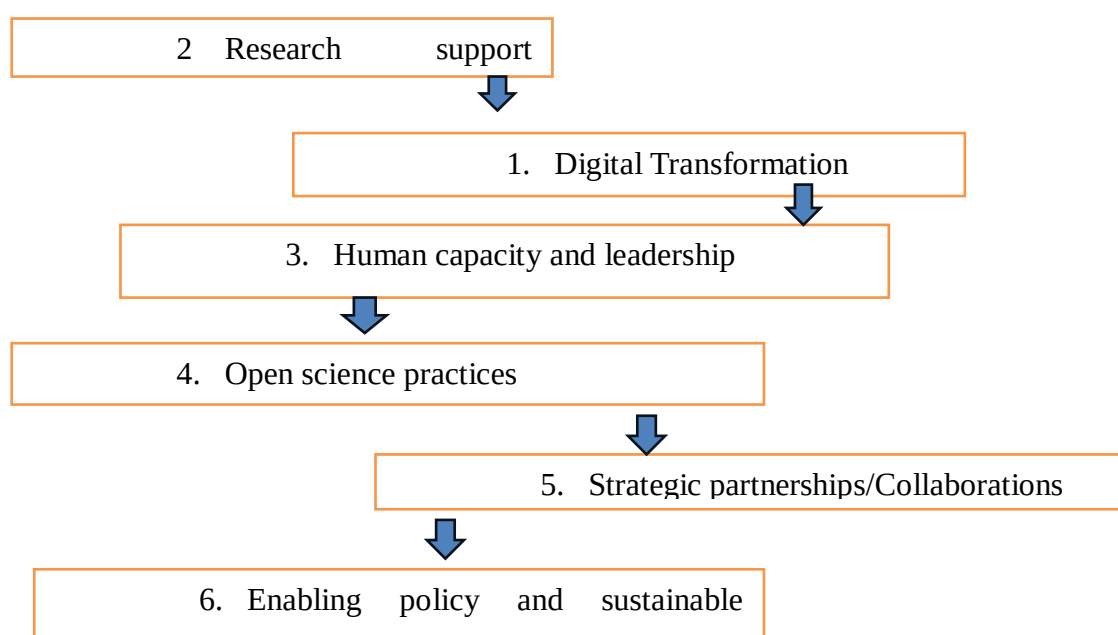
preservation, citizen engagement, and evidence-informed decision-making that extend the impact of university scholarship beyond campus boundaries. Community engagement has therefore emerged as an essential dimension of contemporary academic librarianship, reinforcing the library's role as a catalyst for sustainable development and social transformation.

The integration of research excellence and sustainable community engagement has therefore created an urgent need to reposition academic libraries strategically. Repositioning extends beyond technological modernization; it entails a comprehensive transformation encompassing organizational culture, leadership, service philosophy, professional competencies, policy frameworks, collaborative partnerships, and innovative service delivery models. Such transformation requires academic libraries to embrace user-centered approaches, digital innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, open science principles, and evidence-based decision-making capable of responding effectively to the evolving needs of researchers, students, policymakers, industry, and local communities.

Although substantial literature has examined research support services, digital transformation, scholarly communication, and community engagement independently (Raju & Schoombee,2014; Bangani,2023;Ho&Wong,2025;Nguyen et al.,2026), relatively limited conceptual attention has been devoted to integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive framework for repositioning academic libraries within developing contexts (Moazzami et al.,2025Egodawele et al.,2022;Akidi et al.,2025). Existing studies frequently examine isolated aspects of library development without adequately explaining how strategic repositioning can simultaneously strengthen research excellence and sustainable community engagement under conditions characterized by resource limitations and institutional complexity. The identified conceptual gap have limited the development of integrated policy frameworks for transforming academic libraries in developing countries.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper proposes the repositioning of academic libraries which should be conceptualized as an integrated transformation process driven by six interrelated blocks by this diagram:



These blocks collectively strengthen the operational capacity of academic libraries and enhance their responsiveness to contemporary research and societal demands.

The framework posits that when these strategic blocks are effectively implemented, they will enhance library innovation, service quality, research productivity, knowledge dissemination, and stakeholder collaboration. Improved library performance subsequently contributes to two mutually reinforcing outcomes: **(1) Research excellence and sustainable community engagement**. Research excellence is reflected in to improved scholarly productivity, research visibility, collaboration, and innovation, **(2) while sustainable community engagement** is demonstrated through inclusive information access, digital literacy, knowledge transfer, and community partnerships. Ultimately, the interaction between these outcomes contributes to institutional competitiveness, national development, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals within developing contexts.

This conceptual framework provides a foundation for future empirical investigations aimed at validating the proposed relationships and assessing their applicability across different higher education environments. Unlike existing models that emphasize isolated dimensions of library development, the framework advances an integrated perspective that recognizes academic libraries as strategic enablers of both institutional research performance and sustainable societal transformation.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEM

Academic libraries have evolved from traditional repositories of information resources into strategic knowledge hubs that facilitatedigital scholarship, and societal engagement. research, innovation, this transformation reflects the changing landscape of higher education, where universities are increasingly assessed not only by their teaching quality but also by their research productivity, innovation capacity, and societal contributions. Consequently, academic libraries are no longer evaluated solely by the size of their collections; rather, their value is measured by their ability to support knowledge creation, research collaboration, digital scholarship, and evidence-based decision-making (Cox & Brewster, 2024).

Recent scholarship suggests that the contemporary academic library functions as an integrated knowledge ecosystem that connects researchers, students, policymakers, industry, and communities through innovative information services and digital technologies. Rather than serving as passive custodians of information resources, libraries now facilitate access to digital repositories, research data services, scholarly communication platforms, bibliometric analysis, and open-access publishing, thereby strengthening institutional research capacity and global scholarly visibility (Garoufallou & Gaitanou, 2023). This evolving orientation has repositioned libraries as active partners throughout the research lifecycle, from literature discovery and data management to publication, dissemination, and impact assessment.

Within developing contexts, however, the realization of these expanded roles remains uneven. Many academic libraries continue to struggle with inadequate funding, obsolete infrastructure, limited digital capacity, and insufficient policy support, thereby restricting their ability to deliver innovative research services comparable to

those in developed countries. Consequently, repositioning academic libraries has become a strategic imperative for enhancing institutional competitiveness and supporting sustainable national development.

Research Excellence as a Strategic Institutional Imperative

Research excellence has emerged as a defining indicator of university performance within contemporary higher education. Increasingly, universities compete for international recognition through research quality, citation impact, innovation outputs, interdisciplinary collaboration, external research funding, and contributions to societal development. Research excellence therefore extends beyond the quantity of scholarly publications to encompass originality, relevance, integrity, visibility, and measurable societal impact (UNESCO, 2023).

The achievement of research excellence depends significantly on robust institutional support systems, among which academic libraries occupy a central position. Contemporary libraries contribute to research excellence by facilitating timely access to high-quality scholarly resources, supporting systematic reviews, managing research data, providing bibliometric and citation analysis services, promoting academic integrity, and strengthening researchers' digital competencies (Corrall, 2021; Cox & Brewster, 2024). Such services enable researchers to navigate increasingly complex scholarly communication systems while improving the visibility and impact of institutional research outputs.

Recent studies further emphasize that libraries contribute to research excellence through the promotion of open science principles, institutional repositories, and collaborative research infrastructures. These initiatives enhance accessibility, transparency, and reproducibility of scientific knowledge while expanding opportunities for international research collaboration. Consequently, academic libraries have become indispensable partners in institutional strategies aimed at improving research quality and global competitiveness.

Sustainable Community Engagement and the Expanding Social Mission of Academic Libraries

Community engagement has become an important dimension of university performance as higher education institutions seek to demonstrate their relevance beyond traditional teaching and research functions. Universities are now expected to generate knowledge capable of addressing pressing social, economic, environmental, and technological challenges while contributing to sustainable development. With these academic libraries serve as important mechanisms for connecting university knowledge with community needs through inclusive information services, lifelong learning initiatives, digital literacy programmes, and collaborative outreach activities (UNESCO, 2023).

Contemporary perspectives increasingly conceptualize community engagement as a reciprocal relationship through which academic libraries not only disseminate knowledge but also collaborate with communities in addressing local development priorities. Such partnerships strengthen public access to reliable information, improve digital inclusion, preserve indigenous knowledge, and support evidence-informed decision-making across diverse sectors. Consequently, community engagement has become an essential indicator of library relevance within developing societies where information inequalities continue to constrain socio-economic development. IFLA, (2023) says Sustainable community engagement requires libraries to move beyond episodic outreach activities towards institutionalized partnerships characterized by continuity, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and measurable social

impact. This shift reflects broader international efforts to position libraries as contributors to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those relating to quality education, reduced inequalities, innovation, and sustainable communities.

REPOSITIONING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The concept of repositioning refers to a deliberate strategic transformation through which organizations redefine their roles, priorities, capabilities, and service models in response to changing environmental demands. Within academic librarianship, repositioning extends beyond technological modernization to encompass institutional leadership, organizational culture, workforce development, service innovation, policy reform, strategic partnerships, and user-centered service delivery.

The need for repositioning has become increasingly urgent as technological advancement, artificial intelligence, open science, research data management, and digital scholarship continue to reshape higher education globally. According to Nwachukwu & Abdulsalami, (2025) Libraries that fail to adapt risk diminishing their institutional relevance despite continued investments in collections and infrastructure. Conversely, libraries that embrace innovation, collaborative partnerships, evidence-based management, and continuous professional development are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to research excellence and sustainable community engagement.

REPOSITIONING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Research excellence has become a strategic priority for universities seeking to enhance their global competitiveness, institutional reputation, and contributions to national development. International university ranking systems increasingly emphasize research productivity, citation impact, innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and societal relevance as key indicators of institutional performance. Consequently, Cox & Brewster, 2024 added higher education institutions are under growing pressure to establish research ecosystems capable of generating high-quality scholarly outputs while responding to complex societal challenges. Within this evolving landscape, academic libraries have emerged as indispensable partners whose contributions extend beyond information provision to encompass comprehensive research support throughout the scholarly lifecycle.

Traditionally, academic libraries were primarily responsible for acquiring, organizing, preserving, and providing access to information resources. But, added by Garoufallou & Gaitanou (2023) these responsibilities remain fundamental, they are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of contemporary research environments characterized by digital scholarship, open science, artificial intelligence, big data, and collaborative knowledge production. The complexity of modern research requires libraries to assume proactive roles in supporting research planning, evidence synthesis, data management, scholarly publishing, research visibility, and impact assessment. Consequently, the repositioning of academic libraries has become an institutional necessity rather than an optional organizational reform.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly portrays research excellence as the outcome of interconnected institutional systems rather than individual researcher effort alone. Libraries contribute significantly to these systems by reducing barriers to information access, strengthening researchers' digital competencies, facilitating interdisciplinary

collaboration, and supporting responsible research practices. Some studies like that of Corral, 2021; Cox & Brewster, (2024) demonstrate that universities with well-developed library research support services often exhibit stronger research performance because researchers receive continuous professional assistance throughout the research process. This evolving perspective positions academic libraries as active collaborators in research rather than passive service providers.

The emergence of open science has further expanded the strategic responsibilities of academic libraries. Open science promotes transparency, accessibility, collaboration, and reproducibility throughout the research process. Libraries increasingly coordinate institutional repositories, support open-access publishing, manage research data, and advise researchers on copyright, licensing, research ethics, and data stewardship. These services enhance the visibility, accessibility, and long-term preservation of institutional research outputs while increasing opportunities for international collaboration and knowledge exchange (IFLA, 2024). Consequently, repositioning libraries within open science ecosystems strengthens both institutional research capacity and global scholarly participation.

Digital transformation has also equally reshaped the nature of library support for research excellence. Emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, research analytics, and digital scholarship platforms have transformed how researchers discover, evaluate, organize, and disseminate knowledge. Libraries are increasingly integrating these technologies into research support services through intelligent discovery systems, citation management, plagiarism detection, bibliometric analysis, virtual research consultations, and digital scholarship laboratories. Such innovations improve research efficiency while enabling libraries to respond proactively to changing researcher expectations (Nwachukwu & Abdulsalami, 2025).

With these developments, academic libraries in many developing contexts continue to face substantial structural constraints. Chronic underfunding, inadequate ICT infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, insufficient broadband connectivity, limited access to subscription databases, and shortages of digitally competent librarians significantly restrict institutional capacity to support research excellence. These challenges not only reduce researchers' access to quality information resources but also constrain libraries' ability to adopt emerging technologies and innovative research support services (Aina & Mabawonku, 2024). Without strategic repositioning, these limitations may continue to widen the research performance gap between institutions in developing and developed countries.

In addressing these challenges this requires a comprehensive transformation that extends beyond technological investment. Repositioning academic libraries for research excellence demands visionary leadership, sustained institutional commitment, continuous professional development, evidence-informed policy, and strategic collaboration among librarians, researchers, funding agencies, and university management. Libraries must increasingly position themselves as research partners by participating in grant development, systematic reviews, bibliometric evaluation, research data services, digital preservation, and scholarly communication initiatives. Such integrated support strengthens institutional research ecosystems while enhancing the quality, visibility, and societal impact of research outputs.

Ultimately, repositioning academic libraries for research excellence represents a strategic investment in institutional development rather than a routine administrative reform. Libraries that successfully embrace innovation, digital transformation, collaborative partnerships, and researcher-centred services become unique components of university research infrastructure. Their contribution extends beyond supporting scholarly productivity to strengthening institutional competitiveness, enhancing international visibility, promoting knowledge exchange, and advancing sustainable socio-economic development. Therefore, repositioning academic libraries should be regarded as a prerequisite for building resilient research ecosystems capable of addressing the complex knowledge challenges confronting developing contexts.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

UNESCO, 2023& IFLA, (2023) the contemporary university is increasingly expected to demonstrate societal relevance by ensuring that teaching, research, and innovation contribute directly to sustainable development. Consequently, community engagement has emerged as the third mission of higher education, complementing the traditional functions of teaching and research. Within this evolving institutional landscape, academic libraries are no longer confined to serving internal university communities; they are increasingly recognized as strategic platforms for extending knowledge, fostering social inclusion, and facilitating partnerships that address local and national development priorities

Community engagement within academic librarianship has evolved from occasional outreach programmes to a more integrated institutional responsibility characterized by collaborative knowledge exchange, lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and evidence-informed community development. Rather than viewing communities as passive recipients of information, contemporary library practice promotes reciprocal engagement in which universities and communities co-create knowledge capable of addressing complex socio-economic challenges. This paradigm reflects broader global efforts to democratize access to information and strengthen the societal relevance of higher education institutions.

Academic libraries contribute to sustainable community engagement through multiple pathways. They promote equitable access to credible information resources, organize digital and information literacy programmes, preserve indigenous knowledge, support entrepreneurship and innovation, facilitate public access to research findings, and collaborate with schools, governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities. According to Aina & Mabawonku, (2024) Such initiatives strengthen knowledge transfer beyond university campuses while promoting informed citizenship and inclusive development. These expanding responsibilities position academic libraries as important intermediaries between academic knowledge and societal application.

The growing adoption of open science further reinforces the community engagement role of academic libraries. Open-access repositories, institutional archives, and digital knowledge platforms have significantly improved public access to scholarly outputs that were previously restricted by subscription barriers. Libraries increasingly facilitate the dissemination of locally generated research, thereby enabling policymakers, healthcare professionals, educators, entrepreneurs, and community organizations to utilize research evidence in addressing developmental challenges.

Consequently, libraries contribute not only to knowledge preservation but also to the translation of research into practical societal benefits (IFLA, 2024).

Digital technologies have equally expanded opportunities for community engagement. Through virtual reference services, institutional repositories, digital libraries, webinars, online information literacy programmes, and social media platforms, academic libraries now engage broader audiences beyond their immediate institutional boundaries. These technologies enable libraries to support remote learners, underserved populations, persons with disabilities, and geographically dispersed communities while reducing barriers to information access. In developing contexts, where physical access to academic libraries may be limited, digital engagement has become an essential strategy for promoting educational equity and social inclusion (Nwachukwu & Abdulsalami, 2025).

Sustainable community engagement remains constrained by several contextual challenges across many developing countries despite these opportunities. Limited funding, inadequate ICT infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, insufficient policy support, and weak collaboration between universities and external stakeholders continue to restrict the scope and sustainability of library outreach initiatives. In addition, community engagement activities are frequently absent from institutional performance indicators, resulting in inadequate investment and limited recognition of their developmental significance. Addressing these barriers requires universities to integrate community engagement into institutional strategic plans while recognizing academic libraries as central partners in achieving broader societal objectives.

Repositioning academic libraries for sustainable community engagement therefore requires a transition from service-centred operations to partnership-oriented knowledge ecosystems. Libraries must increasingly collaborate with government agencies, industry, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and international development partners to design inclusive information services that respond to local priorities. Such collaborations not only enhance the social relevance of universities but also strengthen public trust in academic institutions as agents of sustainable development.

Most importantly, research excellence and sustainable community engagement should not be viewed as independent institutional goals. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing dimensions of a contemporary university's mission. High-quality research generates knowledge capable of addressing societal challenges, while meaningful community engagement ensures that research findings are translated into practical solutions with measurable developmental impact. Academic libraries occupy a unique position at the intersection of these two functions by facilitating knowledge creation, dissemination, accessibility, and application. Consequently, repositioning academic libraries provides a strategic pathway for simultaneously strengthening institutional research performance and sustainable societal transformation.

STRATEGIC PATHWAYS FOR REPOSITIONING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Repositioning academic libraries requires a holistic transformation that extends beyond technological upgrades to encompass institutional leadership, policy innovation, workforce development, collaborative partnerships, and user-centred service delivery. As higher education systems continue to evolve, academic libraries must adopt strategic

approaches that strengthen their capacity to support research excellence while enhancing their contributions to sustainable community engagement. The literature suggests that successful library transformation depends on the integration of multiple organizational and technological dimensions rather than isolated interventions Cox & Brewster, 2024.

1. Strengthening Research Support Services

Academic libraries should expand their traditional responsibilities by embedding comprehensive research support services throughout the research lifecycle. Beyond providing access to scholarly resources, libraries should actively support systematic literature reviews, research data management, scholarly publishing, citation analysis, bibliometric services, and research impact assessment. Increasingly, librarians are expected to function as research partners who collaborate with academics in grant proposal development, evidence synthesis, research dissemination, and compliance with open science requirements. Such integrated services improve research quality, increase institutional visibility, and strengthen scholarly productivity (Corrall, 2021).

2. Accelerating Digital Transformation

Digital transformation remains central to repositioning academic libraries. Investment in integrated library systems, institutional repositories, cloud-based services, artificial intelligence applications, digital preservation platforms, and virtual reference services enables libraries to deliver innovative, efficient, and user-responsive services. Emerging technologies also support personalized information retrieval, automated cataloguing, research analytics, and enhanced discovery systems that improve user experiences and research efficiency. In developing contexts, digital transformation should be accompanied by investments in reliable internet connectivity, sustainable ICT infrastructure, and cybersecurity to ensure long-term service resilience (Nwachukwu & Abdulsalami, 2025).

3. Building Human Capacity and Leadership

Technological innovation alone cannot transform academic libraries without corresponding investments in human capital. Continuous professional development is therefore essential for equipping librarians with competencies in digital scholarship, artificial intelligence, research data management, bibliometrics, scholarly communication, and open science. Equally important is transformational leadership capable of fostering innovation, strategic thinking, organizational learning, and adaptive institutional cultures. Libraries that invest in leadership development and workforce capacity are better positioned to respond proactively to emerging research and community needs.

4. Promoting Open Science and Knowledge Accessibility

Open science has become an important framework for enhancing research transparency, collaboration, and societal impact. Academic libraries play a critical role in promoting open-access publishing, managing institutional repositories, supporting research data sharing, and improving the visibility of institutional scholarship. Through these initiatives, libraries reduce barriers to information access while increasing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and public engagement with research. Promoting open science also strengthens knowledge democratization, particularly within developing contexts where access to subscription-based resources remains limited .

5. Strengthening Strategic Partnerships

Academic libraries cannot effectively achieve research excellence and sustainable community engagement alone there should be a Strategic collaboration with university management, researchers, funding agencies, governmental organizations, industry, professional associations, and community stakeholders is essential for expanding service delivery and mobilizing resources. Such partnerships facilitate collaborative research, knowledge exchange, digital inclusion programmes, entrepreneurship support, and community outreach initiatives that enhance both institutional relevance and societal impact. Collaborative governance therefore represents a critical dimension of library repositioning.

6. Developing Responsive Policies and Sustainable Funding Models

Many of these challenges confronting academic libraries in developing contexts originate from weak institutional policies and inadequate financial investment. Sustainable repositioning therefore requires policy frameworks that recognize libraries as strategic research infrastructure rather than routine administrative units this will strengthening the policy and build models. Governments and university management should prioritize sustained investment in digital infrastructure, electronic information resources, staff development, research support services, and community engagement initiatives. Diversifying funding sources through grants, partnerships, philanthropy, and research collaborations can further strengthen the financial sustainability of library transformation programmes.

Collectively, these strategic pathways demonstrate that repositioning academic libraries is a multidimensional process requiring coordinated institutional action rather than isolated technological interventions. Libraries that successfully integrate research support, digital transformation, human capacity development, open science, strategic partnerships, and enabling policies are better equipped to promote research excellence while advancing sustainable community engagement. Such transformation positions academic libraries as resilient knowledge ecosystems capable of supporting the evolving missions of universities within developing contexts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the rapidly evolving higher education landscape has fundamentally redefined the strategic role of academic libraries, necessitating a transition from traditional information repositories to dynamic knowledge ecosystems that actively support research excellence and sustainable community engagement. The paper demonstrated that contemporary academic libraries contribute to research excellence through expanded research support services, digital scholarship, scholarly communication, research data management, institutional repositories, and the promotion of open science. Libraries play a significant role in advancing sustainable community engagement by facilitating equitable access to information, strengthening digital literacy, preserving indigenous knowledge, and fostering collaborative partnerships that translate academic knowledge into practical societal benefits. These complementary roles position academic libraries as essential drivers of both institutional development and sustainable socio-economic transformation.

The paper proposed some effective repositioning which requires an integrated approach built upon strategic leadership, digital transformation, continuous professional development, enabling policy frameworks, sustainable funding mechanisms, collaborative partnerships, and user-centred service innovation. Rather than implementing

isolated technological interventions, universities should adopt comprehensive transformation strategies that strengthen the institutional capacity of academic libraries to respond proactively to emerging research and community needs.

SIGNIFICANT AND IMPLICATION

The repositioning of academic libraries has important implications for higher education institutions, policymakers, librarians, funding agencies, and development partners. As universities strive to improve research quality and societal impact, academic libraries should be recognized as strategic institutional assets rather than auxiliary support units. Their integration into university research and innovation strategies is essential for strengthening institutional competitiveness and achieving sustainable development objectives.

The paper also emphasizes the need for stronger partnerships between academic libraries and external stakeholders, including government agencies, industries, professional associations, civil society organizations, and local communities. Such collaborations will facilitate knowledge exchange, improve the societal application of research findings, and strengthen the contribution of academic libraries to sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper presents a conceptual perspective on repositioning academic libraries for research excellence and sustainable community engagement. Consequently, its require empirical validation across different institutional and national contexts. Future studies should investigate on:

1. The relationships among digital transformation, research support services, leadership, policy support, and research excellence using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches.

Comparative studies involving universities from different developing countries would provide valuable insights into contextual variations influencing library transformation. Such investigations could identify best practices and policy interventions capable of enhancing institutional research performance while addressing local developmental priorities.

Future research should also examine:

2. The emerging influence of artificial intelligence, research analytics, digital scholarship centres, open educational resources, citizen science, and research data management on the evolving roles of academic libraries.

Additionally, studies should also explore organizational readiness, leadership competencies, user perceptions, and institutional culture would contribute to a deeper understanding of factors facilitating successful library repositioning.

Finally, there is need to develop and empirically validated integrated models that explain how knowledge transfer, innovation, strategic library repositioning influences research excellence, and sustainable community engagement within higher education institutions. Such evidence would strengthen theoretical development while informing institutional policy and professional practice.

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