

Five Laws of Library Science in the Context of Modern Academic Libraries: Its Relevance

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Abstract: *The Five Laws of Library Science as opined by Ranganathan came as a worthy contribution to the field of Library and Information Science, providing libraries and librarians with principles to guide their practices and decision-making. This study analysed these laws to ascertain if there is a gap between these laws and modern practices as obtained in academic libraries today. The study used a qualitative research approach with theoretical framework grounded in library science. Results on the analysis of the Laws and discussions of the laws in the context of modern academic libraries were given. The study concluded that the five laws of library science remain relevant to modern academic libraries, now seamless and intertwined in terms of service delivery especially to the present-day users.*

Keywords: library science, academic library, five laws, library science

INTRODUCTION

The chronicled backdrop that prompted the emergence of the Five Laws of Library Science is keenly embedded in the early 20th century, when libraries were experiencing notable evolution as a result of growth in information communication technology (ICT), springing forth fresh societal needs, user needs, challenging librarians' capacity and knowledge on new approaches to information management and services. The Five Laws of Library Science was proposed by Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan- also known as the father of library in India, philosopher, educator, mathematician and a professional librarian. He formulated the Five Laws in 1928 and later published in his book titled 'The Five Laws of Library Science' in 1931. Since then, these laws have served, contributed and influenced the fundamental principles that guide the organization and management of libraries and librarianship worldwide for nearly a century. According to Ranganathan (1931), the first law states that (1) Books are for use; (2) Every person has his or her

book; (3) Every book its reader; (4) Save the time of the reader; (5) Library is a growing organism. Essentially, these laws emphasized the importance of user-centered services and the dynamic nature of libraries, especially and within the context of the nature of libraries then. This is evidenced in the fact that the advancement of libraries today was not in the picture of these laws because the structure and target of the society and libraries then was to reduce illiteracy by encouraging reading and activities that promoted such. Because these laws were pertinent and central to the literate needs of the society and libraries at that time, it had a big influence on the field of library science that was just finding its place then; when the whole idea of a library were majorly on books and every study that has to do with such books as provided by any library in a given place; a traditional library. Thus, the library was more majorly understood as the home of books and quite place to read, giving credence to the emergence of the five laws of library science. This perception of the 20th century library still persists in many societies today, especially in developing ones like Nigeria. Igboechesi, Musa, Enna, and Solomon (2021) study on “Library Knowledge: The Nigerian Student Perspective” shows that an average educated Nigerian’s perspective of the library is that it is just associated with books alone. Others see it as a good environment for studying i.e. where students can complete different home works, assignment and other classroom related reading, such as reading for examinations.

Overtime, series of developments have taken place from the stated period to advance and multi-versatile state of the 21st century modern library, evidently presenting a gap between traditional library science and modern practices. The present era is primarily characterized by rapid technological advancements and an increasing reliance on digital resources, with a dynamic generation of users known as Generation Z (Gen Z) defined by their uncommon technological characteristics and information seeking behavior in terms of the usage of the library and information resources therein. Academic libraries serve as critical hubs for knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and preservation for these categories of users and more (modern and traditional). As a result, the 21st century academic library is faced with a lot of competition and challenges such as digital transformation, diverse user needs, and infrastructural resource constraints. However, this paradigm shift doesn’t change the fact that Ranganathan is still considered by librarians all over the world to be the father of modern library science, especially with his proposed five laws of library science in the early 1930s under discussion. The beauty about these laws is that they are not only precise and concise with rooms for vast interpretation but also a legacy to the information field and academic world. The nature of these laws made most scholars in library science accept them as the foundations of the philosophy of their work and service in the library because they have remained a centerpiece of professional values and as powerful inspirations for social change (Babu, 2011). It is therefore essential to assess how these laws - Ranganathan’s principles - apply to contemporary academic libraries in accordance with the evolution of technology in this digital era. The study intends to ascertain if there is indeed a gap between the five laws of library science which many believe to be rooted more in the traditional library science and modern practices as obtained today, focusing on how these laws are still in tune or not in tune with the current modern academic library operations.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyze the five laws of library science in the context of modern academic libraries.
2. Evaluate the impact of technology on the implementation of these laws.
3. Enumerate on the implications of the five laws in modern academic libraries.

Research Problem

Despite the transformative impact of technology and globalization, academic libraries often struggle to balance traditional principles with modern demands. Though academic libraries have evolved in all spheres, it has equally lead to numerous emergences of challenges like the increasing change in user behavior. There is a need to reassess the relevance and application of Ranganathan's Five Laws in the face these challenges from emergence digital resources to the changing user behavior. This research seeks to address the gap in understanding how Ranganathan's Five Laws be can reinterpreted and applied to contemporary academic library contexts, to ascertain whether these foundational principles can still guide library practices effectively in today's academic library ensuring their relevance in a rapidly changing information landscape.

Significance of Research

The research provides framework for better understanding of the relevance of the Five Laws to modern academic libraries by examining and analyzing them at par and connecting them to modern academic libraries in terms of its place and implementation. Thereby contributing to enhance informed strategies for improving academic library services and supporting academic success. In specific terms, this research is significant for these reasons:

- i. *Preservation of Library Philosophy*: It reinforces the importance of Ranganathan's laws as foundational elements in library science.
- ii. *Guidance for Librarians*: It provides practical insights for librarians on adapting traditional principles to meet modern needs.
- iii. *Enhancement of User Experience*: By aligning library services with user expectations, libraries can improve their relevance and impact within academic institutions

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach, involving a literature review of the original book by S.R Ranganathan titled The Five Laws of Library Science and other research analysis of case studies of modern academic libraries. The aim for the use of this methodology is to show the reader that what has been studied has a connection with the modern academic library and its Gen Z users so as to ascertain if or how these laws still fits in this era.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of library science, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the needs of users and providing access to relevant information resources. The Five Laws of Library Science provide a foundation for this framework,

emphasizing the importance of making books and other information resources accessible to users. Thus, the theoretical framework for this study is based on Ranganathan's Five Laws:

1. *Books are for use*: This principle emphasizes accessibility and encourages libraries to prioritize user engagement.
2. *Every reader his/her book*: Libraries should cater to diverse user needs by providing a wide range of materials.
3. *Every book its reader*: Each resource should be discoverable by its intended audience.
4. *Save the time of the reader*: Libraries must streamline access to information through efficient services.
5. *The library is a growing organism*: Libraries must adapt and evolve in response to changing information landscapes.

These laws will be analyzed in conjunction with contemporary developments and challenges faced by academic libraries, such as information communication technology (ICT), digital resource management and modern user-centered service design.

RESULTS: Indications of Five Laws of Library Science

Ranganathan's Five Laws are fundamental laws of library science, which to a large extent, provide the rationale for a unifying theory of library science. They are more than mere generalities postulated by Ranganathan because they are founded on observation and analysis, coming from a mathematician by study and librarian by practice and training too. It has the ability to postulate, canons and principles applicable in different fields of Library and Information Science (LIS); providing guidance in the practice of Library Science (Babu, 2011).

The most basic law of Library Science is the first Law; "Books are for use." According to (Ranganathan 1931, p.22), the first law was the intuitive flash of his mathematics teacher, Professor Ross, and the rest of the laws were propounded by Ranganathan himself. One primary reason why this law was in place was that the need to clarify and promote the use of books as apt. At his time, the transition from the ancient and medieval periods when the emphasis was on storage and preservation and the use of books was limited in libraries. Libraries at that time were regarded more as institutions for preserving the books and less of use. With the series of industrial revolutions that took place, it birthed the idea and concept of a modern library, more accommodating and encompassing. The modern library in that era not only served as institutions for preserving the books but also as a service institution to serve the social information needs of its users. Ranganathan's aim was to buttress the need for the use of books in the library, adding to the exiting aspects of preservation and storage which are equally important. To ensure the efficiency and maximum use of these books, Ranganathan added that there are some pertinent considerations to be addressed like the library location; which he stated that a Library must be situated in the midst (central) of its users, where it can be accessed by all in such community or institution. Another aspect is on the library hours; he stated that the opening and closing hours should be tailored to tally with the community or institution it serves. Best reading facilities is also inclusive of the considerations in the sense that library furniture should be comfortable, sufficient

lighting system, quality stack rooms with vermin proof, sound proof floors etc. Depending on the nature of target clientele it serves, library facilities should be made to function easy. In addition, book Selection is another aspect which stated that it should meet the needs of the present and potential users and be kept clean and in good condition and from time to time, worn out and obsolete books should be weeded out from the library collection. The last consideration is on the quality of library staff in place because to disseminate knowledge and to put the books to maximum use, libraries must have highly qualified and professionally trained staff to assist the users who most often do not know how to use the information resources. This why the first law has the most vital effect on the library staff because accessing, finding and using library resources is the responsibility of the library staff.

The second law; “Every reader his/her book” buttresses the overtone of the first law as perceived from the side of readers in greater detail. Ranganathan opined that if the First Law replaced the notion which states that “books are for preservation”, then, the Second Law augments the notion which states that “books for the chosen few.” This literally meant that libraries are open for all; man and women in any society, with different educational background, irrespective of their ages. To achieve this, Ranganathan proposed certain tasks to the (a) State (government); to establish and maintain library systems and ensure their development along proper lines because it is a responsibility of the State. In addition, he opined another task is on the (b) Library Authority, who he said are responsible for the choice of the books and choice of the staff in the library. Selection of books by the library authority should be determined through a comprehensive user survey of different groups of users to be sure that their information needs are met. This way, they can build up a collection for the community they serve. The most important task of these is on the (c) library staff. Any of the mentioned tasks above cannot efficiently see the light of the day without the efficient discharge of their duties professionally. To professionally discharge their duties, the staff must make sure that every user not only get or uses a book but get or use their desired book while in the library. On the part of the (e) users, their task is to make sure that they abide by the rules and regulations of the library in order to use the library resources and also get service delivery in an effective and efficient manner.

The third law, “Every book its reader,” posits that every book is meant for the reader, stressing the maximum use of books by their readers, not the filing the library shelves or stack room. It relates to finding out about every book in the library because an appropriate reader should be found for every book. Ranganathan maintained that libraries may well work out diverse techniques to ensure that each book finds it fitting reader. The books on their own, cannot reach the hands of the readers, so the librarian must bring the readers into contact with the books. There is an interconnectedness between this law and the second one but the hub is on the book itself, meaning that the there is a person or persons who each book in the library is valuable or useful to. Based on the precepts of this law, it advocates for a (a) proper catalogue system; plays a critical role in the arrangement and orderliness of books to be accessed by users, (b) proper shelf arrangement; brings books on the same subject together in classified sequence based on their thought content for easy peruse, especially when they are properly labeled and with guides, (c) open access systems; where users are allowed to select books/information resource from the shelves on their own, (d) easy access;

this is also an important aspect of the third law because it emphasizes on the need for libraries to use racks with reasonable standardized heights in shelving their books to prevent the challenge of reaching them and (e) display of books /publicity; librarians should ensure that new books are displayed for users to see so as to augment the chances of use and also publicize the resources available in the library through magazines, institutions and communities.

This fourth law, “Save the time of the Reader” affirms the fact that effect service delivery of a library lies in its ability to satisfy the information needs of the library user efficiently. The approach here is from the perspective the users on the value of service given to them from the moment they enter the library to the moment they leave. The law emphasizes on saving the time of library users through the use of unique suitable methods like the adoption of latest technologies in library operations and the orientating users on how to go about them. Because this law completely depends on making the process of accessing information resources easy for the user, Ranganathan posits that certain considerations should be met, like, (a) library location; if the library is close enough, users will have reasons to always visit, where it is not, the law suggests that branches of the library should be in place to ease the stress of getting to the library, (b) reference services; a reference library staff should have adequate professional knowledge and be active to serve the interests of users in an efficient and effective manner so as to provide adequate personal help to users; such help is known as reference service, (c) efficient circulation system is another consideration that should be met in saving the time of users because enables exact information on books being issued and returned in reasonable possible time. In addition, this is the law that really tests the efficiency of the library in its style of operations like the methods of classification, cataloging, issuing of books, proper shelving of books, etc.

The Fifth Law states, “library is a growing organism,” connotes the library and its services as an ever-expanding organization. Ranganathan asserted that the growth of an organism can be of two kinds; growth as of body of the child and growth as the body of an adult. “As of body of the child” exemplifies the overall increase in size and weight of a child’s growth, likening it to the capacity and capability of the library material/resources growth and its ability to take in more. “As the body of an adult” connotes the library physical building as that of an adult that cannot grow beyond certain size. So whilst the building may not grow beyond its size, the resources materials can continue to grow. The hallmark of a child’s growth is characterized by biological developments and physical health, primarily determined by the adequate supply of many balanced building materials; nutritional factors imbedded in eating quality food and other habits. Similarly the building of a repository in the library should be capable of growth to incorporate additional material. On the other hand the building of a service library need not grow beyond a certain size, as is the case with the body of an adult. It is an accepted idea according to Ranganathan, that a library is a growing organism based on the following elements; (a) growth in size; in the quality and resource material expansion and the building too (b) growth in users; this is the biggest growth of a library, it helps more when the users are satisfied with services provided and (c) growth in library staff; adequate and qualified staff, training and retraining them is pertinent for the steady growth of the library.

DISCUSSIONS: The Five Laws in the Context of Modern Academic Libraries

Deductions from the analysis above show that Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science reflect the core philosophy of library and information science till this day by emphasizing the principles of accessibility, user-centeredness, service, efficiency and adaptation. Through time, these laws have gone through several attempts at "modernizing" and "expanding" them, exemplified in the works of the American interpretation of 1975, Jim Thompson (1992) revised version, James R. Retting's 1992 extension of a Sixth Law; "Every reader his freedom," Michael Gorman and Wait Crawford suggested extension of five new laws in 1998, etc. (National Institute of Open Schooling, 2020). The fact remains they are fundamental because they are relevant in relation to the past of these disciplines; they are relevant in relation to the present day developments, and they will continue to be so in relation to their future development' (Bhattacharya 1984). Though Ranganathan's era was not one that information communication technology, especially computers, thrived, and also not a time technology was imbedded in library and information science, his contributions through these laws indicate that he lived very much ahead of his time because these laws are still the center-piece of scholars and experts in library and information science till date. The study's findings, based on academic libraries as case studies reveal the following:

1. **Books are for use:** In today's digital age, modern academic libraries prioritize digital access, open educational resources (OER), and remote services, ensuring equitable access to information. This means that presently, the law extends beyond physical books; online access of information resources is assured and readily available when and where they are needed and accessed. It now includes variety of digital resources such as electronic books (e-books), electronic databases, e.g. Proquest Research Library, and multimedia contents. Academic libraries are increasingly focusing on making all forms of knowledge accessible through user-friendly interfaces using online platforms. For instance, many academic libraries now offer remote access to digital collections, ensuring that students and faculty can utilize resources from anywhere and anytime. This is line with the quest of making sure that these information resources are used by patrons.
2. **Every reader his/her book:** Modern academic libraries now User-centered services; catering to diverse populations with varying information needs, including personalized recommendations and assistive technologies, enhance inclusivity, engagement and to alleviate or possibly abrogate impediments that affect users capacity in making effective use of electronic resources . This law underscores the importance of personalized services such as tailored reading lists, subject guides, and reference consultations. Academic Libraries are also leveraging data analytics to understand user preferences better and curate collections that reflect the interests and academic pursuits of their respective unique communities.
3. **Every book its reader:** This principle highlights the importance of effective advanced cataloging systems and classification systems that facilitate discoverability or discovery of platforms and proactive outreach connecting users with relevant resources. It also includes the incorporate electronic resources into virtual learning domain and other web pages of the academic institution. In addition, modern academic libraries now operate with advanced metadata standards and search technologies. This has greatly enhanced the

visibility of their collections. Implementing robust discovery tools enables their users to find relevant materials quickly; thus, fulfilling this law's intent.

4. **Save the time of the reader:** One of the core practices in any modern academic library is that it is a fast-paced academic environment; providing Meta search capabilities to explore a total deposit of electronic resources and link the outcome so that users get access to the best source. Presently, academic libraries leverage automation, artificial intelligence, and streamlined processes to improve efficiency because time efficiency is critical in information services. They are usually top on the list of categories of libraries that are adopting technologies such as chatbots for instant reference assistance, automated check-out systems and mobile apps that streamline access to library services, e.g. University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, all in United State of America has a mobile app for library and online research. Presently, some academic libraries in Nigerian university libraries are actively improving by developing and implementing library apps through the most frequently used library management systems in Nigerian university libraries, Koha, which can be integrated with mobile app functionality. Institutions like the Federal University of Technology Minna, Benue State University and Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi, Benue State are few examples of institutions known to utilize library apps. These apps often include features like mobile OPAC access, overdue notices, new book alerts, library event information, and the ability to request interlibrary loans. Based on this, other Nigerian university libraries are already seeing the need for the adoption of mobile-friendly OPACs and services to access their collections through mobile devices.

These innovations significantly reduce the time users spend searching for information or navigating library services, thereby saving the time of the users.

5. **A library is a growing organism:** This law reflects the necessity for academic libraries to adopt flexible designs and continuously adapt to new challenges and opportunities, sustainable practices, and innovative technologies to evolve with user needs. It buttresses the fact that modern academic libraries are not static; they evolve by integrating new technologies, expanding digital collections, and reassessing user needs regularly, offering access to patrons anytime and anywhere through the invisible web. The growth encompasses not only physical space and infrastructures but also digital infrastructures, ensuring that libraries remain relevant in an ever-changing educational landscape.

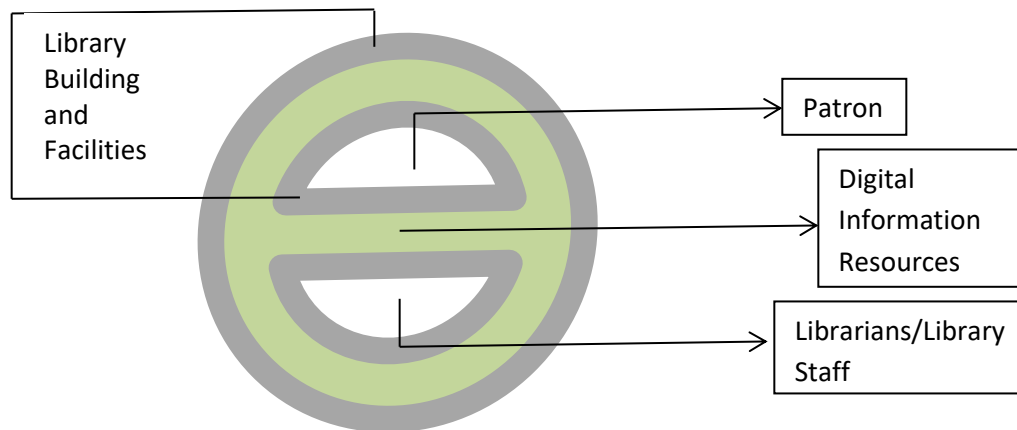
Therefore, in automated academic libraries today, OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) fulfills all the laws of library science. Sitting at a computer terminal, a user can search the entire collection of the library and gets to know if the required document is available in the library or not. User can reserve a book, recommend a new title to be purchased and renew a borrowed book. With academic libraries that use Library Management systems (LMS) e.g KOHA, users can access the academic library collections from anywhere within the campus and outside, anytime (24 hours on all days of the week). This means that the library goes to the user instead of the user coming to the library. Library networking has brought the collection of various libraries together in the form of a union database catalogue of resources. For example, Proquest Research Library, Access to Global Research in Agriculture (AGORA), EbscoHost, Elsevier – ScienceDirect, Global Online Access

to Legal Information (GOALI), World Digital Library (Journal Collection), Scopus etc. all with millions of digital online accessible resources for users.

With respect to services in a modern academic library, it is now boundless. In this digital age, the five laws are seamlessly intertwined between the following:

- i. **Patrons:** They remain the essence of every reason the library exist. The constant thing here is that they change all the time in their preference of service provision. Presently, the Gen Z's are more inclined to technology based information resources.
- ii. **Digital Information Resources:** Libraries for patrons in this digital age is already boundless. Most of the patrons need more online/digital access to information than visiting the libraries. Even when they do, they need the creative and open spaces to use their computers (Laptops) or the one provided by the library to gain access to resources needed.
- iii. **Librarians/Library Staff:** They are still needed to orientate and or train the users on how to go about trending /updated ways of accessing information resources, answer questions relating to issues that may be raised by patrons and making sure that these resources are organised in a way that patrons (users) can access them with ease and precision.

Figure 1: Reality of a Modern Academic Library



The diagram above depicts the reality in a modern academic library whose users are mostly by Gen Z. While library building and facilities exist, they are majorly boundless users, not necessarily registered. They access information online, through platforms created by the library and also connect with librarians or library staff when needed. The five laws are intertwined in the basic aspects noted.

CONCLUSION

The Five Laws of Library Science, formulated by S. R. Ranganathan in 1931, stand as timeless principles that continue to shape the philosophy and practice of librarianship. These laws serve as guiding beacons, illuminating the path for librarians as they navigate the complexities of the modern information landscape. This study demonstrated the ongoing relevance of the Five Laws

of Library Science to modern academic libraries. They still provide a timeless framework that continues to guide modern academic libraries in their mission to serve users effectively. These principles also allow academic libraries to thrive amidst ongoing transformations in information access and user engagement strategies. While the core principles remain intact, their application has evolved significantly due to technological advancements and changing user expectations. By reinterpreting these laws within contemporary contexts, academic libraries have enhanced their services and while maintaining their vital role in supporting education and research in their respective communities. Ranganathan's vision for libraries as dynamic entities dedicated to user service is more pertinent than ever as institutions navigate the complexities of the digital age, reminding us that academic libraries are not just repositories of books and information but vital engines of progress, enlightenment, and societal empowerment.

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