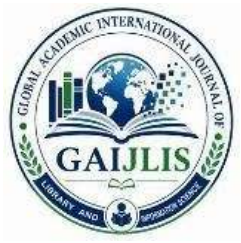
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DEVELOPING RESILIENT LIBRARIES: FRAMEWORKS FOR EMPOWERING LIBRARIANS TO PROVIDE MODERN SERVICES

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Abstract

This theoretical study examined developing resilient libraries through frameworks for empowering librarians to provide modern services. Four objectives guided the study. The literature review examined the concept and characteristics of resilient libraries, changing roles and competencies of librarians, staff training and empowerment, frameworks for developing organisational resilience, and modern library services. The study adopted the capability based conceptualisation of organisational resilience developed by Duchek in 2020 as its theoretical foundation. A theoretical research approach was adopted through critical review and synthesis of relevant scholarly literature, professional publications and research studies on library resilience, librarian competencies, professional development, technology adoption and modern service delivery. The review found that resilient libraries require preparedness, adaptability, strong leadership, technological readiness, service continuity, collaboration, resource flexibility and organisational learning. The literature also showed that librarians require digital, technological, communication, research, problem solving, leadership and innovation competencies to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Staff training, continuous professional development and management support were identified as important mechanisms for librarian empowerment. The study further found that resilient librarians can support modern services through virtual reference, electronic information services, digital repositories, social media, makerspaces and artificial intelligence supported services. The study concluded that resilience should be developed as an organisational capability. It recommended regular resilience assessment, continuous competency development, structured resilience planning and direct empowerment of librarians to develop and evaluate modern services.

Keywords: Resilient Libraries, Empowerment, Librarians, modern Services, Innovation, Competencies

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Introduction

Libraries operate in an environment characterised by rapid technological development, changing user expectations, economic pressures, emergencies and continuous changes in information behaviour. The traditional library model, which depended heavily on physical collections and face to face services, has increasingly been complemented by digital resources, electronic information services, virtual reference, online learning support and technology based research services. Resilience has therefore become an important consideration in library management because libraries must maintain essential services while responding to unexpected disruptions. Garnett (2021) explained that resilient libraries need to move beyond a reactive approach to risk management towards deliberate resilience building that enables them to cope with disruption, adapt to changing conditions and learn from experience. Resilience in libraries is therefore connected with preparedness, adaptability, continuity and the ability to sustain essential services.

Librarians are central to the development of resilient libraries because technologies and policies alone cannot guarantee continuity of library services. Librarians require professional, digital, interpersonal and managerial competencies that enable them to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Research by Agim and Azolo (2022) found that digital literacy among library staff included electronic communication, internet use, computer operations and social networking, while staff acquired these skills through self learning, colleague support, management training, seminars and workshops. The study also linked digital literacy with improved online information services and reference activities. These findings demonstrate that the resilience of libraries is partly dependent on the ability of librarians to acquire and apply relevant competencies as professional responsibilities change.

Modern library users expect services that are accessible, responsive, technology supported and available beyond the traditional physical library environment. Librarians can use social media to disseminate health information and reach users through channels beyond conventional library services. Similarly, Endouware and Agim (2025) found that librarians viewed AI tools as potentially useful for improving user services, although technical expertise and implementation challenges affected adoption. These developments indicate that resilient libraries require librarians who can learn, adapt and apply new technologies while maintaining professional values.

Developing appropriate frameworks for empowering librarians is therefore important for sustaining modern library services during normal operations and periods of disruption.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, libraries should possess the organisational capacity, skilled workforce, technological resources and flexible service systems required to continue providing relevant services during changing and disruptive circumstances. However, many libraries continue to face inadequate infrastructure, limited professional development opportunities, technological skill gaps, financial constraints and difficulties adapting traditional services to emerging user expectations. Nigerian libraries may have limited training opportunities, inadequate ICT infrastructure and insufficient staff competencies can constrain effective digital service delivery. The consequences include interruption of services, reduced responsiveness and difficulty adopting modern technologies. Although previous studies have examined library resilience, digital literacy, technological adoption and service innovation separately, limited attention has been given to an integrated framework that connects organisational resilience, librarian empowerment, competency development and modern library services. This gap necessitates the present theoretical study.

Objectives of the Study

The study on developing resilient libraries: frameworks for empowering librarians to provide modern services, seeks to:

1. Examine the concept and characteristics of resilient libraries in the contemporary information environment.
2. Identify the major competencies required to empower librarians to function effectively in resilient libraries.
3. Examine frameworks and strategies for developing librarian resilience and organisational capacity.
4. Examine how empowered and resilient librarians can contribute to the provision of modern library services.

Concept of Resilient Libraries

A resilient library is a library that possesses the capacity to anticipate disruption, prepare for challenges, maintain essential functions, respond effectively to adversity and adapt its operations after changing circumstances. Resilience therefore extends beyond disaster recovery because it involves preparedness, learning, adaptation and organisational improvement. Garnett (2021) explains that

library resilience involves coping, adaptation and transformation, while resilience building requires libraries to examine their risks, vulnerabilities, procedures, resources and relationships with their communities. A resilient library should consequently have systems that enable it to continue important services even when normal operations are affected.

Library resilience also depends on organisational relationships, leadership and staff capabilities. Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020), in their study of Mzuzu University Library after a destructive fire, found that individual, organisational and relational capabilities contributed to the restoration of library services. They argued for proactive and systemic resilience rather than relying mainly on unexpected external assistance after disruption. Resilient libraries should therefore prepare before disruption occurs and develop internal capabilities that support continuity, flexibility and service recovery.

Concept of Frameworks for Library Resilience

A framework for library resilience is a structured arrangement of principles, capabilities, processes and strategies through which a library prepares for disruption, responds to challenges and adapts its services. A framework provides guidance for identifying vulnerabilities, developing resources, strengthening staff capabilities, establishing procedures and maintaining service continuity. Duchek (2020) conceptualised organisational resilience around three connected stages, namely anticipation, coping and adaptation. This approach is useful for libraries because it encourages organisations to prepare for possible threats rather than waiting until disruption occurs.

A library resilience framework should also recognise that resilience is not solely an organisational responsibility. Librarians, library leaders, users, technology specialists and institutional authorities contribute to resilience. Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020) demonstrated that organisational, individual and relational capabilities were important in restoring library services after the destruction of a university library. A comprehensive framework should therefore combine organisational planning with staff empowerment, professional learning, collaboration, technology and resource development.

Concept of Librarian Empowerment

Librarian empowerment refers to the process through which librarians are provided with the knowledge, skills, resources, authority, confidence and opportunities required to participate meaningfully in library operations and service development. Empowered

librarians are more capable of making informed professional decisions, solving problems, adopting new technologies and responding to changing user needs. Empowerment therefore involves more than training because it also requires management support, access to resources, participation in decision making and opportunities to apply acquired competencies.

Professional development is an important component of empowerment. Agim and Azolo (2022) found that library staff acquired digital literacy through management training, formal education, seminars, workshops, self study and assistance from colleagues. The study also identified management support and training opportunities as important factors affecting digital skill development. This suggests that librarians are more likely to contribute effectively to resilient and modern library services when institutions provide opportunities for continuous learning and practical application of new competencies.

Concept of Modern Library Services

Modern library services are services designed to respond to contemporary information needs through appropriate professional practices, digital technologies, flexible delivery methods and user centred approaches. They include virtual reference, electronic information services, online user education, digital repositories, research support, mobile services, social media communication, makerspaces, artificial intelligence supported services and other technology enabled activities. Modern services are not defined solely by the technology used but by their ability to improve accessibility, responsiveness, relevance and user experience.

The development of modern services requires librarians to possess appropriate technological and professional competencies. Elejene, Agim, and Umunnakwe (2025) reported that robotics which is an aspect of AI were perceived by librarians as potentially effective for improving user services, although limited technical expertise and implementation costs affected adoption. Similarly, library innovation through makerspaces could expand service delivery, while inadequate trained staff and administrative support represented important barriers. These findings show that modern services require both technological investment and empowered personnel.

Contemporary Libraries and the Need for Organisational Resilience

Libraries operate within social, technological, economic and institutional environments that can change rapidly. Disruptions may arise

from natural disasters, fire, pandemics, cyber threats, financial difficulties, technological failures, changes in institutional policy and changing patterns of information use. Garnett (2021) argued that libraries need to move from a traditional reactive approach towards resilience building. This means that libraries should identify vulnerabilities, develop preparedness measures and establish the capacity to continue critical functions when normal operations are disrupted.

Resilience also involves learning and adaptation. Duchek (2020) described organisational resilience as a capability involving anticipation, coping and adaptation. Applied to libraries, anticipation involves identifying possible risks and preparing resources and procedures. Coping involves maintaining critical services during disruption, while adaptation involves changing structures and practices in response to lessons learned. A resilient library therefore does not merely return to its previous condition but uses experience to improve its capacity to respond to future challenges.

2. Characteristics of a Resilient Library

A resilient library requires more than emergency plans. It should possess capable staff, supportive leadership, reliable communication, appropriate technology, resource flexibility, strong partnerships and procedures for maintaining essential services. Garnett (2021) identified connectedness, risk and vulnerability, planning and procedures, and available resources as important areas for considering library resilience. These dimensions provide a useful basis for examining the capacity of libraries to withstand and recover from disruption.

Resilient libraries should also be flexible enough to change service delivery methods when circumstances require it. During major disruptions, libraries may need to move from physical services to virtual communication, electronic resources, remote reference and online instruction. Welsh et al. (2021) found that library leaders responding to the COVID 19 pandemic had to manage uncertainty, changing user needs and rapid movement towards virtual learning environments. Resilience therefore requires both preparedness and the ability to make timely adjustments.

Table 1: Characteristics of a Resilient Library

Characteristic	Description
Preparedness	Ability to anticipate and prepare for potential disruptions
Adaptability	Capacity to modify services when circumstances change
Flexible workforce	Staff capable of working across changing roles
Strong leadership	Leadership that supports preparedness and innovation
Technological readiness	Availability and effective use of appropriate technology
Service continuity	Ability to maintain essential services during disruption
Resource flexibility	Ability to mobilise alternative resources when necessary
Collaboration	Strong relationships with users and institutional partners
Communication	Effective internal and external information sharing
Organisational learning	Ability to learn from experience and improve practice

Changing Roles of Librarians in Resilient Libraries

The responsibilities of librarians have expanded as information environments have become increasingly digital. Librarians are no longer concerned only with collection development, cataloguing, circulation and reference services. They increasingly participate in digital information management, research support, online instruction, electronic resource management, information literacy and technology supported services. This expanding role means that librarians must be able to move between traditional and modern forms of service delivery.

According to Endouware and Dushu (2021) Digital literacy has become particularly important in this changing environment. Agim and Azolo (2022) found that digital literacy among library staff supported activities such as online information resource management, virtual reference services and internet searching. The study also found that staff acquired digital skills through several forms of learning, including colleague support, self study, formal education and management training. These findings indicate that resilient librarians require continuous opportunities to update their skills.

4. Competencies Required for Resilient and Empowered Librarians

Competencies required by resilient librarians include digital literacy, information evaluation, communication, problem solving, research skills, technology use, leadership, collaboration and adaptability. These competencies allow librarians to continue providing useful services when conventional methods become difficult. Competency development should also include the ability to identify emerging user needs and develop appropriate responses.

Agim, Oraekwe, Chivozo, CyprainMary and Emenari (2020) demonstrated the importance of librarians' ability to use social media for health information dissemination. The study showed that digital platforms could extend the reach of librarians beyond traditional library environments. The authors also identified limited technical expertise as a challenge to AI powered chatbot adoption. These findings demonstrate that modern resilience requires librarians to develop competencies that enable them to adopt technologies rather than merely having technologies available.

Table 2: Competency Domains for Resilient Librarians

Competency domain	Examples of required competencies
Digital competency	Internet use, digital platforms and electronic resources
Information competency	Searching, evaluation and information verification
Communication competency	Online and interpersonal communication
Technology competency	Library systems and emerging technologies
Research competency	Literature searching and research support
Problem solving	Responding to service disruptions and user problems
Adaptability	Adjusting to new roles and circumstances
Leadership	Decision making, planning and advocacy
Collaboration	Teamwork and institutional partnerships
Innovation	Developing and improving services
Risk awareness	Identifying vulnerabilities and preparedness needs
Professional ethics	Privacy, responsible information use and professional conduct

Staff Training, Professional Development and Librarian Empowerment

Continuous professional development is essential for building resilient library workforces. Training enables librarians to acquire new competencies, while professional development provides opportunities to apply and strengthen these competencies. Training may involve workshops, seminars, mentoring, online learning, coaching, peer learning and practical workplace activities. Agim and Azolo (2022) found that library staff acquired digital literacy through formal education, seminars, workshops, management training, self study and assistance from colleagues.

Professional development should be connected with identified institutional and individual needs. Training that is unrelated to actual service problems may have limited value. Librarians should therefore participate in training that addresses technology adoption, digital services, emergency preparedness, information security, research support, communication and innovation. Training should also be followed by practical application and evaluation so that the

institution can determine whether new competencies are contributing to service improvement.

Frameworks and Strategies for Developing Library Resilience

A useful resilience framework should integrate anticipation, preparedness, response, recovery, learning and adaptation. Duchek (2020) proposed anticipation, coping and adaptation as major stages of organisational resilience. Garnett (2021) similarly emphasised risk and vulnerability assessment, planning and procedures, connectedness and available resources in library resilience. Together, these approaches suggest that libraries should build resilience before disruption rather than depending primarily on emergency responses after disruption occurs.

Library resilience also requires relationships and shared responsibility. Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020) found that individual, organisational and relational capabilities were important in the restoration of library services after the loss of a university library. Their findings support the development of frameworks that combine leadership, staff capabilities, organisational culture, partnerships and resource mobilisation. Resilience should therefore be treated as an organisational capacity developed over time rather than a temporary emergency activity.

Table 3: Framework for Developing Resilient Libraries

Stage	Major activities	Expected outcome
Risk identification	Identify threats and vulnerabilities	Clear understanding of risks
Preparedness	Develop plans, procedures and resources	Improved readiness
Staff empowerment	Train and support librarians	Stronger workforce capability
Technology readiness	Provide reliable digital systems	Continuity of digital services
Response	Activate procedures during disruption	Sustained essential services
Recovery	Restore affected operations	Return of critical functions
Reflection	Review what happened	Identification of lessons
Adaptation	Modify systems and practices	Improved future resilience
Continuous learning	Maintain professional development	Sustained organisational capability

Resilient Librarians and Modern Library Services

Resilient librarians contribute directly to the continuity and improvement of modern library services. When physical access becomes restricted, librarians with appropriate competencies can provide electronic

resources, virtual reference, online instruction, social media communication and remote research assistance. During the COVID 19 period, libraries demonstrated the importance of adapting service delivery to changing conditions. Welsh et al. (2021) reported that library leaders had to respond to changing patron needs and rapidly altered learning environments.

Modern services also depend on innovation and technological competence. Agim, Mohammed and Obande (2024) found that makerspaces could support hands on learning, creativity, collaboration and expanded service delivery, while lack of trained staff and administrative support presented challenges. Also, librarians regarded AI powered chatbots as potentially effective for user services, although technical expertise and implementation costs affected adoption. These studies suggest that resilient modern services depend upon librarians who are prepared to learn and apply new technologies.

Table 4: Modern Services and Competencies Required from Librarians

Modern library service	Competencies required
Virtual reference	Online communication and digital reference
Electronic information service	Database searching and resource management
Digital repository	Digital preservation and metadata
Research support	Research methods and information retrieval
Online information literacy	Teaching and digital communication
Social media service	Content creation and online engagement
Makerspace service	Technology use and facilitation
AI supported service	AI literacy and critical evaluation
Mobile library service	Mobile technology and user support
Remote library service	Digital platforms and flexible communication
Current awareness service	Information monitoring and dissemination
Emergency information service	Rapid searching, verification and communication

Theoretical Framework

Organisational Resilience Framework

This study is anchored on the capability based conceptualisation of organisational resilience developed by Stephanie Duchek and published in *Business Research* in 2020. Duchek (2020) conceptualised resilience as a meta capability that enables organisations to anticipate potential threats, cope effectively with adverse events and adapt to changing conditions. The framework therefore contains three major stages, namely anticipation, coping and adaptation. Anticipation involves environmental scanning, preparation and development of

resources before disruption occurs. Coping concerns the ability to handle adverse events while maintaining essential functions. Adaptation involves learning from experience and modifying organisational structures and practices in response to changed circumstances. The framework assumes that resilience develops through organisational capabilities, routines, resources and learning rather than through a single emergency plan.

The framework is suitable for this study because libraries are organisations that must maintain essential information services while responding to technological, social, financial and environmental changes. The anticipation stage relates to identifying risks, assessing staff competencies, preparing technology and developing continuity procedures. The coping stage relates to empowering librarians to maintain services during disruption through alternative delivery methods and collaborative action. The adaptation stage relates to reviewing experiences, improving competencies and redesigning services after disruption. The framework therefore provides a logical basis for understanding how librarian empowerment can contribute to resilient libraries and modern service delivery. It also supports the argument that training, leadership, technology, collaboration and organisational learning should operate together in developing library resilience.

Conclusion

The study concludes that resilient libraries require deliberate development of organisational capacity, professional competencies and flexible service systems. The literature indicates that resilience involves anticipation, preparedness, effective response, learning and adaptation, while librarian empowerment provides the human capacity required to sustain these processes. Resilient librarians require digital, technological, communication, research, problem solving, leadership and innovation competencies. The reviewed literature also indicates that training, professional development, supportive leadership, technological readiness, collaboration and organisational learning are important components of resilience. Modern library services such as virtual reference, electronic information services, digital repositories, social media communication, makerspaces and AI supported services depend on librarians who are prepared to acquire and apply new competencies. The capability based organisational resilience framework therefore provides a suitable basis for understanding how libraries can prepare for disruption while continuously improving their ability to provide relevant modern services.

Recommendations

1. In relation to Objective One, library management should conduct regular resilience assessments covering physical infrastructure, technology, human resources, service continuity, communication systems, emergency procedures and institutional partnerships.

2. In relation to Objective Two, library authorities should establish continuous competency development programmes for librarians which should cover digital literacy, information evaluation, emerging technologies, communication, research support, problem solving, risk management and innovation..

3. In relation to Objective Three, libraries should adopt a structured resilience framework based on anticipation, preparedness, response, learning and adaptation which should involve librarians in risk assessment, emergency planning and service continuity decisions.

4. In relation to Objective Four, library management should empower librarians to design, test and evaluate modern services such as virtual reference, electronic information services, digital communication, makerspaces, mobile services and appropriate artificial intelligence applications. 2025

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