

CHAPTER 8

AFRICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES PARTNERING WITH WIKIMEDIA PROJECTS: VALUES AND BENEFITS

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Abstract

Wikimedia as a foundation is the mother of all Wikis. “It supports hundreds of people around the world in creating the largest free knowledge projects in history” (Wikimedia foundation, <https://wikimediafoundation.org>). Its resources give benefits that can emerge from the collaboration of librarians and Wikimedia. However, despite the rich contents and vast availability of information on Wikimedia, many scholars refute the credibility of Wikimedia contents. This chapter addresses the benefits and values of African academic libraries partnering with Wikimedia projects and gives a brief definition on the concepts of Wikimedia and Wikipedia. How academic libraries directly improve Wikimedia resources for a reliable information; particularly, it highlights the need to rightly posit librarians as custodians of knowledge, relating the campaigns of ILib1Ref and other related projects where librarians in Africa through the African Library and Information Associations and Institution (AFLIA) collaborated with Wikipedia to add reliable sources, edit articles, and write stories to promote the quality, authority, and reliability of intellectual contents in Wikipedia.

It demonstrates the engagement of academic libraries in the development of information resources to aid access to information for all citizens through linking of institutional repository materials to wiki articles in line with the UNESCO policy of ensuring public access to information (UNESCO, 2017). It also discusses challenges associated with the use of Wikimedia resources in some institutions and draws conclusion that Wikipedia promotes discoverability of library resources, librarians improve the reliability of its contents as an important tool to leverage on, in pursuit of academic endeavors, thus providing an interception between Wikipedia and academic libraries.

Keywords

Academic Libraries and Wikipedia, AfLIA, Librarians, Wikimedia, Wikipedia + AfLIA partnership, WikiAfLibs, 1Lib1Ref.

Introduction

Wikimedia provides vast amounts of information resources on any subject matter and is widely used by students, scholars, researchers, and lecturers, yet its resources are not given wide acceptance in academia. In academia, Wikipedia is often treated with negligence and is mostly rejected, citing a lack of authority. However, librarians in Africa cannot afford to neglect the information provided by Wikipedia and its relevance to research, teaching, and learning because Wikipedia has been posited in many studies as a starting point for almost every type of research, as each online query gets results from Wikipedia (O'Neal, 2006).

Before discussing the emerging relationship between African libraries and Wikipedia, it's important to have a basic understanding of Wikipedia and its foundation. First, the *Wikimedia Foundation* is a charitable organization with headquarters in San Francisco, California. The Wikimedia Foundation was founded in 2003 by Jimmy Wales as a way to fund Wikipedia and its sister projects through a non-profit means (Neate, 2008). The *Wikimedia Movement*, often referred to as *Wikimedia*, is the global community of contributors to Wikimedia Foundation projects (Wikipedia, 2021). *Wikipedia* is the free-

access, free content, Internet encyclopedia, supported and hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia operates on five principles called the *Five Pillars*: (1) the identity of Wikipedia as an encyclopedia; (2) adherence to the neutral point of view; (3) free content that anyone can use, edit, and also distribute; (4) respect and civility must exist among Wikipedia editors; and (5) Wikipedia has no firm rules (Otis, 2020). Librarians and other new editors are introduced to Wikipedia with trainings on the five pillars. The five pillars are fundamental principles that guides Wikipedia: - they summarize and provide an understanding of what Wikipedia is in five key points to Wikipedia editors. Information on who can edit, how to edit, collaboration, what Wikipedia is not, the type of contents to add, type of resources to work with, copyright law, online etiquette, and the ruling pattern of Wikipedia forms the content of the five pillars. These make it very essential for new editors, including librarians, to be educated on the five pillars for a smooth sail in the Wikipedia world especially during editing activities.

Wikipedia and Librarians in Africa: Brief History and Future Directions

Wikipedia has become an important source of free knowledge around the globe. In Nigeria, the New Readers Outreach Survey (2016) found that 23 percent of the total population was aware of Wikipedia and 43 percent of those were students (Wikimedia, 2020). Despite this awareness and use, Africa, a continent that is rich in cultures, languages, and music, lacks adequate representation of Wikipedia editors. This gap can be filled by librarians.

Information literacy strives more in the absence of language barriers and this is of high relevance in providing free access to information for all—which is the key aim of libraries and Wikipedia. Hence, in order to fill the existing gap, there is a need for partnerships between African libraries and Wikipedia projects to provide authoritative and reliable resources for the Wikipedia users. These partnerships will transform and encourage a wider acceptance of Wikipedia through



Figure 1 Editing Wikipedia at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Attribution: Kaizenify, CC BY-SA 4.0. < <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

community outreach and trainings as well as nurture librarians and library educators with prerequisite skills to actively be involved in a collaborative and free knowledge space such as Wikipedia, contributing to knowledge, and accurately amplifying Africa's voice (AfLIA, 2019, 2020f; Lubbock, 2018).

The Wikimedia User Group Nigeria (WUGN), managed by Olushola Olaniyan as the president, has been engaging Nigerian librarians in Wikipedia campaign activities such as a maiden campaign, called Wikipedia for Librarians, which kicked off on April 16, 2019, at Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, to train librarians on how to edit and contribute to Wikipedia and sister projects in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2019). WUGN also established a Wikimedia Fan Club in 2017. The club targets Nigerian students, to help them better understand the edits in Wikipedia and also change the negative narratives and myths against the use of Wikipedia for learning purposes. Wiki Fan Clubs have successfully been established in up to seven Nigerian universities, including: - Lagos State University;

University of Ilorin, Kwara State; University of Ibadan, Oyo State; Ekiti State University; Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Ogun State; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and Nigeria Institute of Journalism (Wikimedia, 2021).

Academic libraries in reciprocation have initiated and executed activities that have led to progress in the Wikimedia movement, such as in the case of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. At this university, Dr. Ngozi Osadebe facilitated an Art + Feminism Wikipedia Edit-A-Thon in 2017. Art + Feminism Edit-A-Thons target the underrepresentation of women in the arts on Wikipedia both in contributing to Wikipedia and the amount of content. Editors for the event were recruited and trained from the underrepresented group to fill the existing gap by editing, writing articles, and adding content on relatable materials in Wikipedia (University of Nigeria Library, 2017). Another way that libraries are introducing staff members and the public to the Wikimedia world is through the #1Lib1Ref campaign. On February 6, 2020, WUGN partnered with the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, to improve references on Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2020). These partnerships benefit libraries and Wikipedia and are good steps taken toward promoting a shared mission: to get more diversified and knowledgeable editors who add credible edits and move the Wikimedia movement forward by increasing visibility and free access to information.

Librarians in Africa can help improve Wikipedia by adding materials related to specific topics where information is lacking. Each library holds books containing information that cannot be found on Wikipedia. Moving the information from the book into Wikipedia is an important first step to building and improving articles that relate to the different language Wikipedias. Wikipedia articles include links designed to guide the user, information seeker, or researcher to related pages/resources with additional information (Lally & Dunford, 2007; Stvilia, et al., 2008). Citations from verified materials, such as books, journals, web pages, online newspapers, and institutional repositories, can be added for further details and in consideration for proper citation/referencing of the intellectual output of researchers.

Articles are only as good as their editors, hence the involvement of librarians as editors in Wikipedia continually improves the quality of citations and the myriad of content presently accessible in the Wikipedia domain. The ten simple rules involved in editing Wikipedia state that you need to have an account; learn the five pillars that was discussed earlier as the basic principles of Wikipedia:— be bold, that is, having confidence in the edits you are about to make; be aware of your audience, this means that you have to bear in mind the users of the content you are creating or editing, which will guide you in the language and construct of your work; avoid infringement of copyright; make reliable citations; avoid promoting self, which falls in line with conflict of interest; editing on the subject you are knowledgeable on will help you in sharing your expertise; write neutrally; and ask for help whenever it is needed. It is worthy of note that the talk page is always available for discussion and clarity instead of making intentional errors that may register your username as a vandal (Logan, et al., 2010). Edits are monitored by advanced editors, reviewers, and administrators— especially during edit-a-thon-campaigns—and the editors will revert any edits that do not meet editorial criteria. Editors may sometimes be restricted from editing to prevent vandalism, if previous wiki activities by such editor is perceived to be disruptive. Criteria for accessing edits are determined by the project leader and jury of any campaign or contests completed. Criteria may be based on quality or quantity of edits, contents added, articles written or translated, and citations made, among other criterion depending on the scope of the project. Materials that do not meet the Wikipedia standards for quality, notability, or sourcing, normally gets deleted or removed.

AfLIA and Wikimedia Partnerships

The African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) partnered with the Wikimedia Foundation for the first African Librarians Week, May 24–30, 2020. The event was titled, ‘Promoting African Scholars to the World’ and the hashtags #AfLibWk and #1Lib1Ref (1Librarian + 1Reference) were used to promote the week-long event. The event aimed to build librarian awareness of Wikipedia,

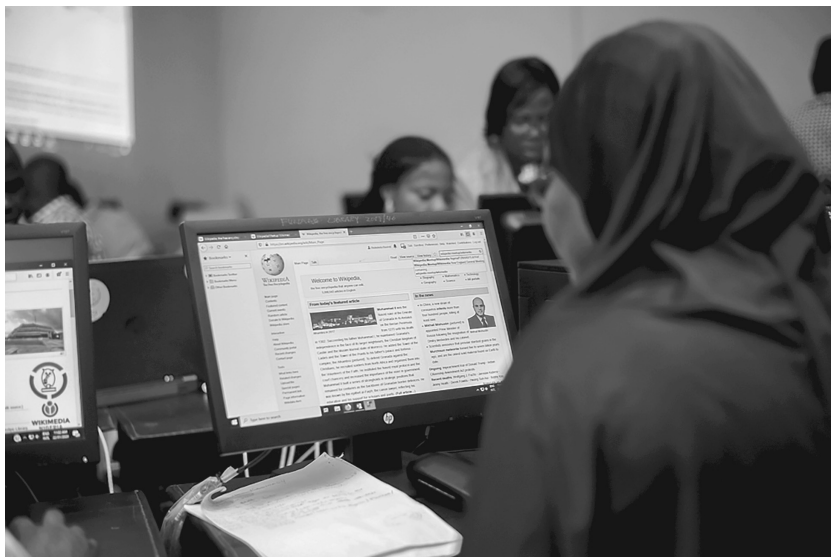


Figure 2 #iLibIRef Campaign, January 2020.

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add citations to articles on Wikipedia, and fill gaps in online knowledge. Library and information professionals from across Africa came together to add accurate and reliable sources to Wikipedia articles, which created the opportunity to amplify stories of African cultures, heroes/heroines, and innovations by Africans in African languages (AfLIA, 2020a). As Felix Nartey, Wikimedia Foundation coordinator of the event, said, “The library community is an important ally for Wikipedia and our mission to ensure every human can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. By training librarians in Africa to contribute knowledge to Wikipedia, we’re improving the encyclopedia’s global representation and diversity, and we’re developing local leaders in Africa for future initiatives that improves public knowledge online using reliable sources” (AfLIA, 2019).

The partnership, according to AfLIA Human Capacity Development & Training Director, Dr. Nkem E. Osuigwe, “will be a great

opportunity for African librarians to collaborate creatively with Wikipedia to drive inclusiveness and more open sharing of knowledge on the global platform” (AFLIA, 2019). The week-long event hosted 241 editors who actively participated in the event out of the record number of 844 editors on the AflibWk dashboard. In the end, 660,539 words were added with 27,846 edits made on 3,946 articles and 10,055 missing references were added. The edited articles gained over 33.6 million views during the African librarians’ week campaign. Most articles about Africa in English and French Wikipedia were edited, though edits on English Wikipedia constituted 96 percent of the overall contribution made during the campaign. However, other local African-language Wikipedias, user groups, and communities, such as Igbo, Hausa, among others, were discovered in the process by African librarians. Librarians from the five regions of Africa; North, East, Central, West, and Southern Africa, from different library types were represented. At the end of the campaign, the top fifty contributors were awarded a certificate of contribution, while the top five also received a prize from AFLIA during the AFLIA 2021 conference in Accra, Ghana. African countries with the most editors, most edits/references added, and most innovative publicity about African librarians on social media were each awarded a plaque (AFLIA, 2020b).

After the Aflib week, AFLIA received a grant from the Wikimedia Foundation to hire a Wikipedian-in-Residence (WIR) and a curriculum development consultant (CDC). In August 2020, Alice Kibombo emerged as the WIR and in September Prof. Rosemary Shafack as the CDC (AFLIA, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e). Both appointees are librarians from Africa who are knowledgeable on the best integration of Wikipedia into African library system. The grant forms further partnership between the Wikimedia Foundation and AFLIA to collaborate in the Wikipedia in African Libraries Project to produce a suitable curriculum for training over 300 African library and information science professionals of at least ten LIS professionals each from thirty African countries (AFLIA, 2020c).

Prof. Rosemary M. Shafack, the appointed curriculum development consultant (CDC) for the Wikipedia in African Libraries’ project is a professor of library and information science and the director of the University

of Buea Library and Information Services. Her many years of experience in curriculum development as a university teacher is evident in her positions and involvements in many teaching modes. As the CDC and alongside the WIR, she will adapt the OCLC existing curriculum on Wikipedia + Libraries: Better Together, used to train American public librarians, to design an instructional module that will be suitable for training African librarians who will participate in the pilot testing and the two different cohorts of the Wikipedia in African Libraries project. This curriculum will equip participants with the skills to aid different user communities in using Wikipedia for learning, give life to their individual stories, and create contents in their native languages (AfLIA, 2020e).

The Wikipedian-in-Residence, Alice Kibombo is a practicing librarian at Goethe-Zentrum, Kampala, a member of Wikimedia Community User Group Uganda, and has coordinated many Wikimedia campaigns and projects locally and internationally. The WIR was signed to facilitate the WikiAfLibs training and work remotely with Prof. Rosemary Shafack, the CDC for the success of the project. Future participants will have three opportunities to partake in the course, that is, in the pilot testing or in any of the two cohorts. The pilot aimed to test the adapted curriculum took place from November 16 to December 20, 2020. The first cohort will be admitted from February to April, 2021, and second cohort from May to July, 2021 (AfLIA, 2020d, 2020g). Benefits of the course include training of librarians on how to assist their users to use Wikipedia, to create the opportunity for global communities to amplify their stories, and to nurture Wikipedia community and African libraries' relationships, leading to future collaborations and mutual benefit (AfLIA, 2020f). As she said in her tweet discussion with AfLIA on August 29, 2020, "It has the potential to positively influence information creation and dissemination in a number of ways . . . for starters, individuals will be in a position to identify and create content that would fill knowledge gaps." This surely is a mutual benefit to AfLIA and Wikipedia.

Moving Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

Wikipedia is a multilingual online encyclopedia, which maintains an open collaboration with the community of volunteer editors using a

wiki-based editing system. In African countries, this presents librarians with the challenge of locating the various language communities. As a result, some librarians may be working solo or struggle to engage with the Wikipedia community. Finding editors who speak the same language or librarians willing to join the movement and finding resources written in local languages can be a tedious task.

Librarians need to raise awareness on the relevance of Wikipedia in teaching, learning, and research. This awareness would expose the values and positive features of Wikipedia, which would help clear existing misconceptions surrounding Wikipedia. Librarians could learn from Wikipedia user groups, such as Wikimedia Nigeria, and local language hubs, which are creating awareness and collaborating effectively.

Wikipedia is a starting point for research and is often the top result in Google searches (OCLC, 2020). Wikipedia articles can link to external library resources such as institutional repositories. This creates visibility to not only the institutional repository and library holdings, but also the author of that intellectual work, which would in turn bring maximum impact to publications and improve the library's profile.

Wikipedia also gives room for amplification of stories that are not available on the open web (OCLC, 2020). Libraries, as a powerhouse of knowledge, hold a lot of stories, pertaining to histories, cultures, and indigenous knowledge that may not be in existence or openly accessible online. Librarians can write articles based on their frequently asked questions, reference queries, notable personalities, and burdening issues in their present environment with links to verifiable resources to back up the stories.

Using Wikipedia to teach research improves best practices such as proper and enhanced use of Wikipedia for research, learning, literature review, contribution to knowledge, coding, online etiquette, citation, and, above all, copy-right, among others (Hoeck & Hoffmann, 2013; Kalaf, 2018). Students being taught the dynamics of Wikipedia articles would take them into the world of critical thinking, reading, and deep research skills, because the hyperlinks that lead to different information would equip their flexibility in online navigation, intensify their literature search skills, as well as improve their source evaluation. An online

Wiki Edu handbook on evaluating Wikipedia is available to aid any user in the rudiments for evaluating the quality of articles, be able to recognize biases in any article, and develop strong habit in evaluating the resources being used while researching (Wikimedia Commons, 2016). Contributors can be identified by their username, which directs you to their user pages for further assessment. The progress of each article can be monitored and the article talk page is a good avenue to access the editing history, including the controversies surrounding any article.

Conclusion

Academic libraries in Africa partnering with Wikimedia projects is a relevant collaboration. It equips library professionals with the skills to freely add reliable contents to the free online encyclopedia as well as provide access for digital skills training to the community of librarians. The similarities coexisting in the mission and vision of the two entities necessitated the partnership. Wikipedia is a wonderland of information, therefore active involvement of libraries in editing Wikipedia will encourage proper and enhanced usage of Wikipedia for academic activities. Integration of Wikipedia into academic library services enhances free access to knowledge and encourages the building of further partnerships. The existing partnership serves as a litmus to the high compatibility and relevancy of long-term collaboration. Wikipedia promotes discoverability of libraries' resources and librarians improve the reliability of Wikipedia contents. Using Wikipedia is not something to be ashamed of, but an important tool to leverage on, in pursuit of your academic endeavor. Academic libraries + Wikimedia means sustainability of free knowledge/information and literacy for all.

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