Unizik Orient Journal of Education (UNIOJE), Vol. 12, No. 2, January, 2026.
----------ISSN: 0794-9525----------

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT: EMPOWERING ACCESS OR REWRITING THE RULES

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Abstract:
This paper explores the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in library management, evaluating its benefits, challenges, and ethical implications. The discussion emphasizes how AI can enhance cataloging, reference services, administrative efficiency, and user engagement while underscoring the continued importance of human oversight. By reviewing current literature and case studies, the paper argues that AI should serve as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for librarians, ensuring libraries remain centers of equitable knowledge access.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Library Management, Access, The Rules.

Introduction:

Library is a collection of printed and electronic resources organized by information professionals and other experts in a physical and virtual space to enable users conveniently access information (Emmasiegbu, Okeke & Asiegbu, 2024). A library is a place/source of making information resources available to users to satisfy their information needs. The library, according to Igwela and Opara (2020) is the collection of information resources that are selected, acquired, organized for easy access and use. While some agree on the definition of a library as an institution of books collected, processed, stored, retrieved, and used to disseminate knowledge, others prefer the definition that summarizes a library to represent a place (physical) where books and non-book materials are preserved for the purpose of spreading knowledge (Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami, 2014).

Libraries today operate in an era of rapid digital transformation. Beyond cataloging, AI technologies are being applied across multiple dimensions of library management, including reference services, administrative tasks, digital archives, and user engagement. AI can automate routine processes, personalize user experiences, and provide predictive insights that guide collection development. While these applications promise significant efficiency gains, they also raise ethical questions related to privacy, bias, and the potential diminishment of human expertise. This paper argues that AI presents transformative opportunities for libraries, but its integration must be carefully

guided by human oversight and ethical principles to maximize benefits and preserve the core mission of equitable information access.

AI Applications in Library Management:

1. Cataloging and Metadata Creation

AI has revolutionized cataloging and metadata generation by automating tasks that traditionally required significant human effort. Machine learning algorithms can assign subject headings, keywords, and classifications with higher speed and consistency than manual processes. Engel et al. (2025) note that AI-assisted cataloging reduces human error and accelerates processing time, although human validation remains essential to ensure accuracy.

2. Reference Services and User Interaction

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have become integral to modern reference services. These systems can provide 24/7 support, answer frequently asked questions, and guide users through digital resources. A systematic review by Martínez Concha, Palacios Zenteno, and Tello Alfaro (2024) highlights that AI enhances accessibility and responsiveness in academic libraries, improving user engagement and satisfaction.

3. Administrative Efficiency

AI technologies support administrative functions such as circulation analytics, predictive acquisition planning, and inventory management. Libraries can leverage AI to forecast high-demand materials, optimize resource allocation, and streamline operational workflows. This allows staff to concentrate on strategic initiatives, collection development, and user-focused services (ScienceDirect, 2025).

4. Digital Archives and Research Support

AI assists in digitization, optical character recognition, and semantic search across vast collections. This improves access to rare or historical resources and facilitates advanced research capabilities, expanding the library's role as a hub for knowledge discovery.

Advantages of AI Integration:

1. Scalability

AI systems can process large volumes of data without fatigue, enabling libraries to manage expanding collections efficiently. This means libraries can handle growing digital repositories, large-scale digitization projects, and bulk cataloging tasks without increasing staff workload, ensuring that even with exponential growth in resources, organization and access remain manageable (Hasan, Saifullah, & Hashmi, 2024).

2. Personalization

AI recommendation algorithms analyze borrowing patterns and user preferences to provide individualized content suggestions. This personalization increases user engagement by connecting readers with materials they are likely to enjoy or need, encourages exploration of the library’s resources, and can support learning pathways for students or researchers (ScienceDirect, 2025).

3. Extended Availability

AI-driven virtual assistants provide support outside of traditional library hours, offering information retrieval, research guidance, and user assistance around the clock. This continuous service extends access to users in different time zones, remote locations, or those with unconventional schedules, increasing the library's reach and user satisfaction (ScienceDirect, 2025).

4. Operational Insights

Predictive analytics allow libraries to understand trends in usage patterns, peak demand times, and resource popularity. This insight informs strategic decision-making, such as when to acquire new materials, retire outdated resources, or reallocate budget priorities. It also supports evidence-based management, allowing libraries to make informed choices that align with user needs and institutional goals (ScienceDirect, 2025).

Challenges and Ethical Considerations:

A. Skill Gaps and Training

Many librarians lack formal AI training, limiting the effective implementation and oversight of AI systems. Professional development in AI literacy, including ethical data handling, is critical for meaningful adoption (ScienceDirect, 2025).

B. Bias and Algorithmic Fairness

AI systems can perpetuate biases present in training datasets, leading to skewed search results and recommendations. Regular audits and transparency in algorithmic design are necessary to prevent inequities in access to information (Springer, 2025).

C. User Privacy

Personalization often relies on user data, raising concerns about privacy and consent. Libraries must adopt privacy-preserving technologies and clear policies to protect user information while maintaining personalized services (Springer, 2025).

D. Institutional Barriers

Infrastructure limitations, funding constraints, and organizational readiness pose challenges, particularly in developing regions where resources for AI adoption are scarce (ScienceDirect, 2025).

Proposed Solutions to AI Challenges in Libraries

The challenges associated with the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in libraries can be effectively addressed through strategic, ethical, and well-informed approaches supported by recent research:

1. Addressing skill gaps and training remains a critical step in ensuring successful AI implementation in libraries. Many studies have shown that librarians often lack the technical expertise required to effectively manage AI tools and systems (Hasan et al., 2024; ScienceDirect, 2025). To overcome this, libraries should invest in continuous professional development programs that focus on AI literacy, data analytics, and ethical considerations. In addition,

incorporating AI-related courses into library and information science education will help prepare future librarians. Partnerships with academic institutions and technology providers can also support knowledge transfer and skill development.

2. Mitigating bias and ensuring fairness in AI systems is another important solution. AI technologies can reflect biases present in their training data, leading to unfair or skewed information retrieval (Springer, 2025). Libraries should adopt transparent and explainable AI systems and conduct regular audits to identify and correct biases. Using diverse and representative datasets during system training is also essential. Furthermore, involving interdisciplinary teams, including librarians, data scientists, and ethicists, can help ensure fairness and accountability in AI applications.
3. Protecting user privacy is essential when implementing AI in libraries, as many AI systems rely on user data for personalization. Research highlights the importance of strong data governance frameworks to safeguard user information (Springer, 2025; Martínez Concha et al., 2024). Libraries should implement data anonymization techniques, secure storage systems, and clear user consent policies. Privacy-preserving AI methods, such as federated learning, can also be adopted to reduce the risk of exposing sensitive user data while still enabling effective AI functionality.
4. Overcoming institutional barriers such as limited funding, poor infrastructure, and resistance to change is also necessary for successful AI adoption. Studies suggest that a phased implementation approach can help libraries gradually integrate AI technologies (ScienceDirect, 2025). Starting with pilot projects allows institutions to test AI systems before full deployment. Additionally, the use of open-source tools and cloud-based solutions can reduce costs. Forming partnerships with government agencies, private organizations, and international bodies can also provide financial and technical support, especially in developing regions.

Conclusion:

AI offers transformative potential for library management, enhancing efficiency, personalization, and user engagement across multiple functions beyond cataloging. However, its integration must be accompanied by ethical safeguards, rigorous training, and sustained human oversight. Libraries of the future are likely to operate under a hybrid model where AI handles routine tasks while human librarians focus on curation, interpretation, and ethical stewardship. Balancing innovation with responsibility ensures that libraries remain accessible, equitable, and relevant in the digital age.

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