Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

Censorship Issues in Librarianship Analysis and the Way Forward

Dr. Mrs. Omosor Abigail Ufuoma
Southern Delta University, Ozoro

ABSTRACT
This paper examined censorship issues in librarianship, the conflicting positions surrounding intellectual freedom, the major stakeholders involved, and possible strategies for resolving censorship-related conflicts in libraries. The paper adopted a descriptive and analytical approach through the review of relevant literature, legal cases, policy documents, and professional ethical guidelines on censorship and intellectual freedom in librarianship. The study identified librarians, governments, library associations, students, publishers, religious groups, and human rights activists as critical stakeholders with varying interests in information control and access. Findings revealed that censorship threatens intellectual freedom, restricts access to information, weakens democratic values, and limits users' rights to knowledge acquisition. The study concluded that librarians must remain neutral information providers while promoting unrestricted access to information within ethical and legal boundaries. The novelty of this work lies in its integration of legal, ethical, and professional perspectives towards understanding censorship challenges in contemporary librarianship. The paper recommended professional training for librarians, stronger advocacy against censorship, and the protection of users' privacy rights.

Keywords: Censorship; Librarianship; Intellectual Freedom; Access to Information; Library Ethics; Information Policy; Freedom of Expression; Digital Censorship**.**

INTRODUCTION

There are several public policy matters bedeviling the librarianship profession, and one of them is the public policy debate surrounding censorship. The esteemed constitutionalists, Smolla and Nimmer (2017), have discerned the very essence of the policy debate concerning censorship: "Freedom of speech for all people, whether or not they qualify as artistic creators, is the basic principle that underlies the opposition to governmental censorship" (Smolla N, 2006). As Smolla and Nimmer have pointed out, a legal issue lies at the core of this policy debate. Accordingly, this paper will provide a brief introduction to the policy debate in the area of censorship, along with the historical and philosophical trappings, and examine various attempts to delineate the proper boundary between censorship and the First Amendment freedoms, both through consideration of actual legal disputes among stakeholders and efforts by various entities to legally define the appropriate balance. This analysis will then yield insight into what is necessary for the resolution of the policy debate

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

Statement of the Problem

The issue of censorship in libraries and information centres has become increasingly controversial in contemporary society due to the growing tension between unrestricted access to information and attempts by various groups to control the dissemination of knowledge. Libraries are traditionally established to promote intellectual freedom, equitable access to information, lifelong learning, and democratic participation. However, the increasing rate of censorship across different categories of libraries now threatens these core professional values. In recent years, governments, religious bodies, political organizations, pressure groups, parents, and community leaders have intensified efforts to influence the selection, restriction, labeling, filtering, or outright removal of library materials considered offensive, controversial, immoral, politically sensitive, or culturally unacceptable. These restrictions affect both print and digital information resources and undermine the fundamental responsibility of libraries as centres of free inquiry and knowledge dissemination.

Scholars and professional organizations have continued to express concern over the growing interference with intellectual freedom in libraries. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, libraries exist to provide "access to information, ideas and works of imagination without restriction" and should resist all forms of censorship that limit users' rights to information. Similarly, the American Library Association emphasized that "censorship is a direct challenge to the freedom of individuals to read, view, and access information" and that libraries must uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and freedom of expression. These assertions reflect the professional expectation that librarians should remain neutral providers of information rather than agents of ideological control.

Despite these professional standards, censorship practices continue to manifest in various forms within library environments. In many societies, library materials are challenged or removed due to political ideology, religious beliefs, sexual content, cultural sensitivity, or perceived threats to public morality. The emergence of digital technologies and internet-based information systems has further complicated censorship issues, as governments and institutions increasingly utilize internet filtering, surveillance systems, and access restrictions to control information flow. As noted by Curry (2017), censorship in modern libraries is no longer limited to physical book banning but now extends to digital information control, online monitoring, and electronic access restrictions. This development poses serious concerns for librarians who are professionally obligated to protect users' rights to unrestricted information access while simultaneously responding to institutional policies and societal pressures.

Furthermore, the problem of censorship creates significant ethical and professional dilemmas for librarians. Librarians are expected to provide balanced and unbiased access to information resources irrespective of political, religious, ethnic, or ideological considerations. However, external stakeholders often demand the exclusion or restriction of materials they perceive as offensive or dangerous. Such demands place librarians in difficult positions where they must

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

balance professional ethics, institutional regulations, community expectations, and legal obligations. According to Moody (2015), censorship becomes particularly dangerous when librarians unconsciously engage in selective acquisition, labeling, restricted access, or self-censorship due to fear of criticism or institutional sanctions.

Existing studies on censorship have largely concentrated on legal controversies, moral arguments, and constitutional rights relating to freedom of expression. However, limited attention has been given to the interconnected roles of librarians, governments, communities, publishers, and policy frameworks in either promoting or resisting censorship within contemporary library systems. In addition, many previous studies have not adequately examined how emerging digital technologies and privacy concerns contribute to indirect forms of censorship in libraries. This creates a gap in the literature regarding the practical strategies required to protect intellectual freedom while maintaining social responsibility in library practice.

It is against this background that this paper critically examines censorship issues in librarianship by analyzing the major stakeholders involved, their conflicting interests, the ethical and professional implications of censorship, and the challenges posed by both traditional and digital forms of information restriction. The paper further seeks to propose practical and sustainable strategies for safeguarding intellectual freedom, protecting users' rights, and strengthening the role of libraries as democratic institutions committed to unrestricted access to information.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive review design to examine censorship issues in librarianship and their implications for intellectual freedom and access to information. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, conference papers, legal documents, policy statements, and professional ethical guidelines from recognized library organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and the American Library Association. Relevant literature published between 2010 and 2025 was purposively selected using keywords such as *censorship in libraries*, *intellectual freedom*, *library ethics*, and *digital censorship*. Content analysis was employed to identify and analyze major themes relating to censorship practices, stakeholders' interests, ethical concerns, legal implications, and strategies for promoting unrestricted access to information in libraries. The methodology was considered appropriate because it enabled a critical examination of censorship issues from legal, ethical, professional, and technological perspectives.

Conceptual Meaning of Censorship

Censorship refers to the control, suppression, restriction, or regulation of information, ideas, opinions, and creative expressions considered objectionable, offensive, harmful, politically sensitive, or morally unacceptable by individuals, institutions, or governments. In the context

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

of librarianship, censorship affects the availability, accessibility, and dissemination of information resources within libraries and information centres. According to Reitz (2021), censorship involves the prohibition or restriction of books, media, or other information materials by authorities because such materials are dangerous, immoral, or contrary to societal interests. Similarly, the American Library Association (2024) defines censorship as the suppression of ideas and information that certain individuals, groups, or authorities find objectionable or threatening.

Censorship may occur in different forms, including book banning, internet filtering, restricted access to information resources, suppression of publications, removal of controversial materials from libraries, and surveillance of users' information-seeking activities. In modern information environments, censorship has extended beyond printed materials to include digital resources, online databases, social media platforms, films, broadcasts, and electronic communication systems. According to Jaeger et al. (2021), censorship in the digital age increasingly occurs through algorithmic filtering, technological surveillance, internet shutdowns, and restrictions on online content, thereby limiting users' access to diverse viewpoints and information sources.

In library settings, censorship often manifests when library materials are removed, restricted, labeled, filtered, or denied to users because they are perceived as controversial, politically sensitive, sexually explicit, religiously offensive, or culturally inappropriate. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2022) maintains that libraries should resist all forms of censorship and uphold the principle of unrestricted access to information regardless of political, religious, ideological, or cultural differences. This position reflects the fundamental role of libraries as institutions established to support intellectual freedom, democratic participation, education, and lifelong learning.

Censorship can generally be classified into two major forms: prior censorship and post-censorship.

Prior Censorship

Prior censorship occurs when information materials are restricted, modified, or prevented from publication before they become publicly accessible. This form of censorship may be carried out by governments, publishers, media organizations, religious institutions, or regulatory agencies. Prior censorship is commonly associated with pre-publication screening, internet filtering systems, broadcasting restrictions, and governmental licensing regulations intended to control sensitive or controversial information before dissemination. According to UNESCO (2022), prior censorship is often justified on grounds of national security, public morality, political stability, or protection of societal values, although it may significantly undermine freedom of expression and access to information.

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

Post Censorship

Post censorship occurs after information materials have already been published or disseminated to the public. It may involve banning books, withdrawing library materials, restricting access to digital resources, blocking websites, or imposing sanctions on authors and publishers after publication. Contemporary examples of post censorship include the banning of controversial books from school and public libraries, restrictions on online publications, and removal of digital content from internet platforms due to political, religious, or ideological objections. According to PEN America (2023), post-publication censorship has increased globally through book challenges, educational restrictions, and political pressure on libraries and educational institutions.

Censorship is often confused with weeding, but both concepts differ significantly in library practice. Weeding refers to the systematic removal of outdated, damaged, duplicate, or irrelevant materials from library collections for the purpose of maintaining current, accurate, and useful collections. Unlike censorship, weeding is guided by professional collection management policies rather than ideological, political, or moral considerations. Evans and Saponaro (2020) emphasized that collection evaluation and weeding are professional library management practices intended to improve accessibility and collection relevance rather than suppress ideas or viewpoints.

Modern scholars further argue that censorship may occur both consciously and unconsciously within libraries. Librarians may unintentionally engage in censorship through selective acquisition practices, biased classification systems, restricted access policies, or fear of acquiring controversial materials due to community pressure or institutional sanctions. Knox (2020) observed that self-censorship among librarians has become increasingly common in politically polarized societies where librarians fear criticism, funding cuts, or public backlash associated with controversial information materials.

Historically, censorship has existed since ancient civilizations, where rulers, religious authorities, and political leaders-controlled speech, literature, and public expression in order to preserve social order and political authority. However, contemporary censorship has become more complex due to technological developments, globalization, digital communication systems, and ideological conflicts. In democratic societies, censorship remains a major issue because it directly affects intellectual freedom, human rights, academic freedom, and citizens' ability to access diverse sources of information necessary for informed decision-making and societal development.

Concept of Librarian

A librarian is a trained information professional responsible for the organization, management, preservation, and dissemination of information resources in libraries and related information centres. According to Aina (2021), librarians are custodians of knowledge who facilitate access to information resources in both physical and digital environments while

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

supporting teaching, learning, research, and community development. Librarians perform several professional functions, including collection development, cataloguing and classification, reference services, information literacy instruction, digital resource management, circulation services, and research support services.

Modern librarianship has gone beyond the traditional management of printed books to include digital information management, electronic resource administration, institutional repository management, and data curation. As noted by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2023), librarians in the 21st century are expected to promote equitable access to information, digital inclusion, intellectual freedom, and lifelong learning within increasingly complex information environments. This changing role has transformed librarians into information managers, digital educators, technology facilitators, and advocates of information rights.

Librarians are professionally trained in Library and Information Science and are guided by ethical principles relating to neutrality, confidentiality, intellectual freedom, and unrestricted access to information. In many countries, librarianship is recognized as a professional discipline requiring specialized academic qualifications and continuous professional development. According to Evans and Saponaro (2020), librarians are expected to possess competencies in information technology, digital literacy, communication skills, information retrieval, and knowledge organization in order to effectively respond to contemporary information needs.

The emergence of information and communication technologies has significantly influenced the roles and responsibilities of librarians. Modern librarians are increasingly involved in managing electronic databases, digital libraries, online reference services, institutional repositories, and virtual learning platforms. They also assist users in navigating the growing volume of online information and combating misinformation and information overload. Consequently, librarians are no longer viewed merely as custodians of books but as facilitators of knowledge creation, access, preservation, and dissemination in digital societies.

Censorship: A Public Policy Issue

Censorship is widely regarded as a public policy issue because it involves governmental and institutional actions aimed at regulating the creation, dissemination, accessibility, or use of information within society. Public policy generally consists of laws, regulations, decisions, and actions formulated by governments or institutions to address societal concerns and maintain social order. According to Birkland (2020), public policy refers to actions and decisions taken by public authorities in response to identified social problems and public interests. In this regard, censorship becomes a policy mechanism used to regulate information considered harmful, offensive, politically sensitive, or socially unacceptable.

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

In the field of librarianship, censorship refers to the suppression, restriction, removal, or limitation of access to information resources based on ideological, political, moral, religious, or cultural considerations. Reitz (2021) defines censorship as the prohibition or restriction of access to information materials by authorities or institutions on the grounds that such materials are objectionable or dangerous to society. Similarly, the American Library Association (2024) describes censorship as the suppression of ideas and information that certain individuals or groups consider objectionable or threatening.

Censorship practices have evolved significantly in recent years due to technological advancements and the expansion of digital information systems. Contemporary censorship extends beyond the banning of printed books to include internet filtering, content blocking, digital surveillance, restricted access to electronic resources, and algorithmic control of online information. According to Jaeger et al. (2021), digital censorship poses increasing threats to intellectual freedom because information control now occurs through technological systems capable of limiting users' access to diverse viewpoints without their awareness.

Libraries are particularly affected by censorship policies because they serve as gateways to knowledge, education, research, and public enlightenment. Funding restrictions, internet filtering systems, political pressure, and community objections to controversial materials are among the major censorship strategies affecting library services globally. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2022) emphasized that censorship undermines intellectual freedom, democratic participation, and equitable access to information, all of which are fundamental principles of librarianship.

Furthermore, censorship often creates conflicts between professional ethics and governmental or societal expectations. Librarians are professionally obligated to provide unbiased access to information resources regardless of political, religious, cultural, or ideological perspectives. However, governments and community groups may demand restrictions on materials perceived as dangerous, immoral, or politically sensitive. This tension continues to shape policy debates concerning freedom of expression, users' rights, national security, and information regulation in contemporary library environments.

Stakeholders

The issue of censorship in librarianship involves several stakeholders whose interests, responsibilities, and expectations often conflict with one another. These stakeholders include governments, librarians, library associations, students, researchers, parents, publishers, booksellers, religious organizations, human rights groups, and members of the wider community. Each stakeholder plays a significant role in shaping decisions relating to information access, restriction, and intellectual freedom in libraries.

Governments are major stakeholders because they formulate laws and policies relating to national security, public morality, and information regulation. Governments often justify

censorship on the grounds of protecting societal values, political stability, and national interests. However, excessive governmental control over information may threaten freedom of expression and democratic participation.

Librarians and library associations are central stakeholders because they are directly responsible for selecting, organizing, preserving, and providing access to information resources. Professional bodies such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and the American Library Association strongly advocate intellectual freedom and oppose censorship practices that restrict access to information. Librarians are therefore often confronted with ethical dilemmas when societal demands conflict with professional obligations relating to neutrality and equitable information access.

Students, researchers, and library users are also important stakeholders because censorship directly affects their rights to seek, receive, and utilize information for educational, personal, and research purposes. Users often oppose censorship because it limits academic freedom, creativity, critical thinking, and informed decision-making.

Publishers and booksellers are equally affected because censorship may reduce the circulation and visibility of their intellectual products. Restrictions on books and digital publications may negatively affect freedom of publishing and the dissemination of scholarly and creative works.

Religious organizations, parents, and community groups frequently advocate censorship when library materials are perceived to conflict with moral, religious, or cultural values. Such groups often demand the removal or restriction of materials relating to sexuality, politics, religion, race, or controversial social issues. According to Knox (2020), community pressure remains one of the leading causes of book challenges and censorship attempts in public and school libraries.

Human rights organizations and civil society groups also constitute major stakeholders because they view unrestricted access to information as a fundamental human right. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continues to emphasize that freedom of information and intellectual freedom are essential for democratic governance, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

Factors Responsible for Censorship

Several factors contribute to censorship practices in libraries and information centres. One major factor is the fear that certain information materials may negatively influence societal morals, cultural values, religious beliefs, or political stability. Governments, religious organizations, and community groups often advocate censorship to prevent the dissemination of information considered harmful, offensive, controversial, or politically sensitive.

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

Political control and the desire to maintain authority also contribute significantly to censorship. Governments and powerful institutions may suppress information capable of exposing corruption, challenging political ideologies, or promoting social criticism. According to PEN America (2023), increasing political polarization and ideological conflicts have contributed to rising attempts to ban books and restrict educational materials in schools and libraries.

Religious and cultural beliefs equally contribute to censorship practices. Certain groups oppose materials that conflict with their doctrines, traditions, or moral expectations. Consequently, books relating to sexuality, gender identity, politics, and religion are frequently challenged or restricted in libraries.

Technological developments have further introduced new dimensions to censorship through internet filtering, algorithmic content moderation, digital surveillance, and restricted access to electronic resources. Jaeger et al. (2021) observed that digital censorship often occurs subtly through technological systems that monitor, filter, or suppress information without direct physical removal of materials.

Economic and institutional pressures also influence censorship practices. Librarians may engage in self-censorship or selective acquisition due to fear of criticism, funding cuts, administrative sanctions, or community backlash. In some cases, library administrators avoid acquiring controversial materials in order to maintain institutional stability and avoid public disputes.

The Way Forward

Addressing censorship issues in librarianship requires a multidimensional and collaborative approach involving librarians, governments, educational institutions, publishers, professional associations, and civil society organizations. Since the findings of this study revealed that censorship threatens intellectual freedom, democratic participation, users' privacy, and unrestricted access to information, there is a need for practical and sustainable measures aimed at strengthening the role of libraries as centres of free inquiry and knowledge dissemination.

Firstly, libraries should formulate comprehensive collection development and intellectual freedom policies that clearly define procedures for the selection, acquisition, restriction, reconsideration, and removal of library materials. Such policies should be guided by professional ethics, users' information needs, and internationally accepted principles of intellectual freedom rather than personal, political, religious, or ideological sentiments. The policies should also provide transparent mechanisms for handling complaints against controversial materials without violating users' rights to information access.

Secondly, librarians and information professionals should undergo continuous professional development programmes on censorship management, intellectual freedom, digital rights,

information ethics, and users' privacy protection. The study established that many forms of censorship occur indirectly through selective acquisition practices, biased classification, restricted access, or self-censorship arising from fear of criticism and institutional pressure. Regular training and retraining programmes would therefore equip librarians with the professional competence and confidence required to resist censorship and defend equitable access to information resources.

Furthermore, library associations and professional bodies such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and the American Library Association should intensify advocacy campaigns and public enlightenment programmes on intellectual freedom and freedom of expression. Such advocacy should focus on educating governments, parents, religious groups, and communities on the importance of libraries in promoting democracy, tolerance, critical thinking, education, and national development. Public awareness programmes can also help reduce unnecessary hostility towards controversial materials in libraries.

The study also revealed that digital technologies and internet monitoring systems have contributed to indirect forms of censorship in modern libraries. Consequently, libraries should strengthen digital privacy protection by adopting secure information systems that minimize unnecessary tracking and monitoring of users' reading and information-seeking activities. Policies relating to internet filtering and surveillance should be carefully implemented to avoid violating users' confidentiality and freedom of inquiry. Libraries should equally promote digital and media literacy programmes that empower users to critically evaluate information rather than relying solely on censorship as a means of controlling harmful content.

In addition, governments and policy makers should establish balanced information policies that protect national security and public morality without undermining constitutional rights to freedom of expression and access to information. Excessive governmental interference in library services and information dissemination should be discouraged because it weakens democratic values and limits educational and research opportunities. Governments should instead provide enabling environments that support intellectual freedom, academic inquiry, and unrestricted access to diverse information resources.

Collaboration among librarians, educators, publishers, researchers, human rights organizations, and community leaders is equally important in addressing censorship challenges. Such partnerships can facilitate the development of inclusive policies, ethical standards, and conflict-resolution mechanisms capable of balancing societal concerns with users' rights to information access. Educational institutions should also integrate intellectual freedom and censorship studies into Library and Information Science curricula to prepare future librarians for emerging censorship challenges in both physical and digital information environments.

Finally, further empirical studies should be conducted on emerging issues such as digital censorship, algorithmic filtering, internet shutdowns, artificial intelligence-based content restriction, and the impact of surveillance technologies on library users' freedom of access to information, particularly in developing countries where research in these areas remains limited.

Conclusion

Censorship is a difficult issue. It is not, however, a librarian's job to push censorship. Instead, libraries must push for the unobstructed freedom to explore ideas. Libraries need to continue their push to uphold the Freedom to Read and the First Amendment. Anything going against that is censorship and censorship should not be allowed. In managing the library and its services, the librarian should promote inclusion and should not discriminate against any library user regardless of sex, ethnic group, nationality, social condition, religion or political opinions. The librarian should provide the highest level of service through courteous, prompt, adequate, skillful, accurate and unbiased responses to all requests for assistance to the user. As information providers, we must resist censorship of any form; we must avoid it as fire. Information is power, everybody in the society needs it for their survival, once it is made available, the users will be on top of their challenges. While libraries can restrict availability, especially through the selection or selection of materials for ideological reasons, the librarians must exclude their own moral judgments from their work. Problems always arise when information is withheld for the purpose of keeping specific economic, religious, or social classes from progressing which is antithetical to the democratic system and should be avoided by every possible means.

REFERENCES

Aina, L. O. (2021). *Library and information science text for Africa* (4th ed.). Third World Information Services.

American Library Association. (2024). *Intellectual freedom manual* (10th ed.). ALA Editions.

Birkland, T. A. (2020). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Evans, G. E., & Saponaro, M. Z. (2020). *Collection management basics* (7th ed.). Libraries Unlimited.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2022). *IFLA statement on libraries and intellectual freedom*. IFLA.

Jaeger, P. T., Gorham, U., Sarin, L. C., & Bertot, J. C. (2021). Libraries, policy, and censorship in the digital age. *Library Quarterly, 91*(2), 145–162. https://doi.org/10.1086/713049

Knox, E. J. M. (2020). *Foundations of intellectual freedom*. American Library Association.

PEN America. (2023). *Banned in the USA: The mounting pressure to censor*. PEN America Report. https://pen.org

Jewel Journal of Librarianship
ISSN: 2141-3908 (Print); ISSN: 2736-0881 (Online)
https://www.jeweljournals.com/
Volume 21, Issue 2, 2026

Reitz, J. M. (2021). *Online dictionary for library and information science*. Libraries Unlimited.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2022). *Freedom of expression and access to information report*. UNESCO.