



Assessment of the Role of Libraries in Library Resources Provision and Effective Utilization in the Information Technology Driven Society

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Abstract

In this paper authors reviewed definitional and conceptual clarifications of some basic concepts such as library use, Information and Communication Technology, Library resources, library update and how all these concepts have blended to bring a tremendous change in the education sector and the society in general. The study examined the roles libraries should play in ensuring provision and effective utilization of library resources in the electronic environment. Emphasis on the need for the provision of relevant and basic ICT tools for updating library resources and services for improved positive impact on librarians, researchers and libraries were expressed. The study also identified some challenges and problems. This paper concludes by recommending that libraries should take advantage of ICT development by subscribing to digital libraries in their efforts to provide required library and information resources by their patrons. It further maintained that sustaining this vision and providing solutions to some of the library challenges and problems facing technological environment will surely upgrade library services to meet the world best practices for effective utilization and for maximized users' satisfaction.

Keywords: Libraries, resources provision, utilization, technology, information society

1.0 Introduction

The concept "information age" as it relates to the application of information communication technology refers to the extent, the content and the context in which information is being generated, processed, organized, stored and disseminated using the electronic systems in the present day society. It could be termed information society. The advent of new technology commonly now known as Information and Communication

Technology (ICT) has greatly revolutionized the pattern information is generated, organized and accessed. Anaeme (2008) opines that the emerging and fast growing information and communication technology and their application in libraries especially academic libraries have continued to revolutionize the pattern and scope of library services. Libraries in ancient times were primarily established as a storehouse of knowledge opened mainly to royal families

and kings as well as temple workers. The quest for information and knowledge during the renaissance period and industrial revolutions era resulted to the growth of paper production and written records which increased the scope of library collections and services. Today, libraries thus have become the nexus of communication systems to the rapidly growing and expanding information. To cope with growth of knowledge and access to information, new technologies, new dimensions in cultural, socio-political and information breakthrough have given rise to concepts such as information society, information age; all meaning the same thing and can be used interchangeably.

Information society denotes the developments in information communication and media technologies as well as the impact these new technologies have affected the society in general. Kin and Whinston (2002) observe that the information society is characterised by ease of information, interaction richness; and low interaction and information cost. Amaeme further opined that:

The concept of information society is the product of the convergence of several distinct forces in the 1990s. These include rapid technological advances in the information technology sector, the widespread recognition that computers can be used to process and communicate information, the spread of simple, inexpensive and powerful networks.

In fact, these changes have greatly widened and broadened the nature, scope and pattern of the library in terms of library resources and service. This new development has also posed a great challenge to the library and the librarians. The need for librarians to wake up and readjust to the new trends in order to remain relevant has become critical and imperative in library and information science context. The dramatic shift of emphasis of the role of the librarian from the

traditional methods to electronic systems inevitably requires updating the library resources and services. The main purpose of updating library resources and services is to satisfy the users need in the library.

1.2 Library Use or Utilization

The concept “use” can be interchangeably used with the word “utilization”. In a general sense, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) defines 'use' as “to do something with a machine, method, an object, etc. for a particular purpose”. In the library parlance, library use denotes the willingness, ability of the learner to have access to and receive the necessary assistance as to meet his information needs. The efforts point into the utilization of ICT facilities, resources and services with the sole aim of deriving some amount of satisfaction. The availability of library resources/services in both in the traditional and electronic form, creating easy access to the library resources, organizing user education and information literacy programmes, public relations and providing conducive learning environment are some of the indices to encouraging patrons to utilize library materials and services.

1.3 ICT and Library Resources

Many scholars have defined Information and Communication Technology in different ways, each according to how this subject is perceived. The advancement in information technology has paved way to the emergence of various electronic devices to enable and accelerate information communication in the society. Anaeme (2008), defines Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as the application of communication technologies consisting of hardware, software, networks and media for collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information via voice, data, text or images. Thioune

(2003:11) cited in Anaeme (2008:28) describes information and communication technology, as the possibilities offered by the convergence of data processing technologies, electronic data, media and telecommunication, a convergence that has become evident over the few past years. Anaeme (2008) groups information and communication technology into two categories: traditional and electronic formats. The traditional formats include radio, television, fixed line telephones and facsimile machines. The electronic formats are categorised as modern computers and specific data applications accessible through computers such as e-mail, internet, CD-ROM, mobile phones, etc. American Library Association cited by Eseohé (2008) refers to ICT as the application of computers and other technology to the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information to users. Daniel (1999) identifies facilities related to information technology to include cameras, scanners, keyboards, telephones, fax machines, photocopiers, computers, compact disks, video and video tapes, cables, monitors, printers, optical fibre transmission lines, micro-wave nets, televisions, etc. Cochrane (1992) describes ICT as the mechanism of capturing, processing, solving, transmitting, communication information.

Library resources constitute the major collections of a library. All the uses and services carried out in the library radiate around the library collections. There are referred to as all the learning materials in the library collections both in print and non-printed formats acquired, organized, stored, retrieved and disseminated with the aim of supporting, teaching, learning, research and public administration. Basically, library collection of the present age comprised the traditional and electronic formats. The printed materials include textbooks, encyclopaedias, references, materials, handbooks, abstracts,

yearbooks, etc. The electronic systems comprised all information technology facilities and resources – a component of non-print resources. They include radio, television, telephones, and fax machines, among others.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Updating of Library Resources

The emergence and adoption of information technology tools in the libraries have dramatically changed the traditional roles of the library. Libraries and librarians must change their skills, attitude and whole orientation towards the application of these emerging technologies. To update means to keep with time and space in the application and use of ICT facilities, resources and services in order to remain relevant to the library users. Again, the need to acquire new skills, knowledge, and competence in the use of information and communication technology infrastructures as to remain useful and effective in library administration has become imperative. They have been general advocacy for a change in the educational needs of librarians of the present age as to accommodate electronic environment. Olukemi, Fadehan, Hussaini (2010) opine that:

“The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented paradigm shift in the rendering of library and information services worldwide. The ripple effect of the influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on every aspect of human endeavour remains colossal and its impact on library and information services has not been exclusive”.

It has been observed by Sridhar (1999) Igun (2006) and Youngole (2006) that the major consequence of unprecedented paradigm shift in the rendering of library and information services has been the concept of the emergence of electronic services in libraries. This shows that library services

assume a new dimension in philosophy, model and delivery. It is no longer in doubt that the world trend has proved that information provision and delivery had shifted from the traditional models to electronic and web-based formats.

In the light of the change in orientation of libraries in the 21st century, Olukemi, Fadehan and Hussaini (2010), observe that libraries must move from resource-centred, institutionalized and physically bound to network-based. Sridhar (1989, 1995, and 1997) observes that, becoming a network-based library, however, have a lot of technological implications, the single factor being information technology. Youngok (2006), remarks that the changes in nature and roles of libraries vis-a-vis the digital environment have equally brought about the need for the development and acquisitions of new skills and competencies. Oduwole (2005) and Igun (2006) further observe that the needs of old librarians who did acquire the knowledge of these new technologies could be accommodated in this new development. It can be argued that digital libraries cannot operate well to reach their full potential without a well educated digital librarian in the 21st century.

The emergence of ICT has brought about the development of information carriers that could be used to update library resources and services. Anunobi (2005) opines that the ICT facilities available to libraries include: personal computers, CDROM, telefacsimiles (fax) network, electro-copying (scanning) and internet. She also asserts further that ICT facilities available and used in Nigerian University Libraries include personal computers, CDROM, Local Area Network (LAN), internet and e-mail facilities, Wide Area Networks, Fax machines and online Public catalogues. ICT tools for library resources in the new millennium can be categorized to include: internet, World Wide

Web (WWW), electronic mail (e-mail), bibliographic control tools, online searching, computers, creativity and innovations and new information professionals.

2.2. Importance of ICT to Researchers in the Provision of Library Resources

The importance of ICT to library and information professionals has grown so high as to draw public discourse. Daniel, Oketunji, Okojie, and Abdusalami (2003) as cited by Nkanu, Ebaye and Nkebem (2012) maintained that, the application of ICT in Nigeria libraries has today become an acceptable norm being the most realistic way and means of providing timely, accurate and efficient information services. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) opines that, to enhance the availability of information resources and their physical accessibility, libraries in many advanced countries, and in some developing countries have moved toward inter-library cooperation on local, regional, national or even international level. This has led to the creation of library and information networks with individual libraries ceasing to regard themselves as entirely separate systems and adopting the view that they are parts of larger systems. Ugokwe (1992) and Nkanu et al (2012) observe that, most of the available resources that are book centred are usually searched from page to page for useful information. Taking into consideration the tediousness involved in searching manually through records for relative and important information, and integration of computers into the system becomes a laudable positive step that is geared towards reducing time and difficulty involved in providing solutions to innumerable readers' problems. On the need for libraries to share their resources, through electronic means, Madu (2000) observes that, libraries are currently expanding their collections by linking to other libraries catalogues through telecommunication networks such as internet and other local and

regional networks.

Emphasizing on ICT as a basic tool for training and knowledge acquisition among librarians, it is worthy of note that ICT offers new areas for knowledge acquisition, exchange and decision making, and it has become necessary for libraries to partake in it. In a study of library information and computer literacy of the users, Chandrain (2001) opines that, the library users are expected to keep pace with library development so that they can use the electronic information resources by managing and processing the computers themselves. Adediyi (2002) states that, the need for computerization has provided opportunities for libraries wanting to experiment with new accompanying digital/electronic resources and services. Some electronic resources commonly available in libraries are databases, e-journals, e-newspapers, e-books, reference tools (e.g. encyclopaedias), government documents, internet access to websites, OPAC, electronic thesis and dissertation etc and the electronic services are: Online learning services (renewal and inter-lab learning, electronic reserve, reference assistance, e-instructions, research guides, tutorials, online forms etc.

The experience in Nigeria is the growing process of library-reengineering especially in the University libraries where there is a good and growing intention to develop value added digital information products and services. Viewing the library as the life blow of higher education in Nigeria, academic institution can benefit tremendously from the facilities provided by the ICT. Ajayi and Etim (2002) states that, the library can be transformed into a new information services unit, providing electronic acquisition, electronic cataloguing, electronic circulation formations, electronic online public access, electronic serials central and electronic inter-library loan services.

2.3 Need for Updating Library Resources

The need and necessity for libraries to

update their resources through the use of ICT can be seen from the following components:

- The advent of new information technology resulting to the emergence of ICT has dramatically shifted the traditional roles of the libraries. ICT has changed the scope, pattern and contents information is generated, organized, stored, retrieved and disseminated.
- The need for librarians to remain relevant and to retain their jobs.
- To checkmate the efforts of other stakeholders in library and information science related areas take advantage of lack of competencies in ICT to over library and information businesses;
- To acquire the basic skills, knowledge and competencies for effective job performance
- To provide the needed information of current value easily, freely and quickly and with less cost;
- To provide the basic and recent research requirements for teachers, students and other library users
- To enable researchers, libraries, other information professionals make an informed decisions
- To improve on the quality of teaching, learning and research
- To meet with the current trend/development in science, technology, social science, arts and humanities
- To assist the library and the librarians

update current resources and services in the library.

2.4 Challenges of Updating Library Resources through ICT

Despite the numerous beliefs accruing to the libraries arising from the use of ICT, there exist some posed challenges and problems. In many Nigerian libraries, there was that initial apprehension and what has come to be termed 'technophobia' caused by environmental limitations (technological environments), limited ICT facilities, low ICT skills, etc. many professionals and ICT users in Nigerian libraries are met to maximize the opportunities brought about by ICT for enhanced exchange both for improved service delivery and professional development. Also the ICT environment is currently faced with bandwidth and connectivity challenges. Ogbonna and Anunobi (2013) observe that, some of the challenges facing the majors and users of the library involve: continued lack of awareness, poor internet access; poor infrastructure, absence of skilled manpower and absence of external funding.

Conclusion

In today's library functions, emphasis is shifting from the traditional mode of operation to electronic system with a lot of benefits and some observed challenges. New technology resulting to the emergence of electronic or digital library has widened the gap in knowledge creation and access. Social media and electronic tools have greatly enhanced knowledge dissemination, selection and utilization. The development of digital library and information services associated it is a welcomed development in the new technological environment aimed at enhancing library operations and creating global competitive environment in libraries. Sustaining this vision and providing solutions to some of these challenges facing library

driven technological environment will surely upgrade university library services to meet the world best practices for effective utilization and for maximal satisfaction of library users' information needs.

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