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**COMPUTER LITERACY COMPETENCE: A NECESSARY TOOL FOR  
LIBRARIANS' USE IN THE PROVISION OF LIBRARY AND  
INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIAN  
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*One of the basic functions of Nigerian University Libraries is to match the information needs of users with information contents of documents. Proper performance of this function requires the services of librarians, library facilities and equipment. The utilization of information and Communication Technology in Nigerian University Libraries offers quick and easier ways of performing increased work loads of library task with greater efficiency. To attain maximum productivity, librarians need a high degree of computer literacy competence to be able to cope with the demands of the new "world order" required for information search convenience. Therefore, this paper takes a critical evaluation of computer literacy as a concept, need for librarians' computer literacy competence in University Libraries, impact of computer literacy on Nigerian University Libraries, and basic roles of librarians in the provision of library and information services in automated libraries. Recommendation is also made at the end.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1980 according to Scott (2004) held a conference that gathered computer scientists and classroom teachers in United States to make the first attempts at defining Computer Literacy. Norman (1984) asserts that, the marketing of desktop computers in the early 1980s also marked another rise of the computer literacy movement. These created greater awareness on the populace on the need for personal ownership of personal computers which simultaneously correspond with the introduction of the IBM and macintosh Apple personal computers. Computer literacy nowadays is a common slogan among librarians especially in Nigerian University Libraries. But the big question that begs for answer is what does it mean to us as librarians. How could we attain an average if not above average computer literacy level that would enhance effective operation and performance of our traditional roles.

By all standards, computer literacy as a concept is synonymous with computer education, and the meaning of the term “computer literacy” has over the years been changing. Some of the computer literacy exponents have even shifted their emphasis to a concept termed information literacy. Information literacy in the other hand is seen as the combination of traditional literacy concepts and foundational computer literacy skills. Hence, when one talks about information literacy, the computer skills component is usually assured to be a secondary thought after the skills of assessing and using information. In today’s world of information explosion. It is right to say that to be a productive member of the society cum a librarian of repute in a given university environment, one must have knowledge of the computer because it is the “hub” of all other associated information and communication technology (ICT) facilities used in information storage processing and retrieval in University Libraries.

According to Bork (1993), everybody (Librarian) will need to be computer literate in the society of the future because computer will be widely used in all activities.

## NEED FOR LIBRARIANS COMPUTER LITERACY COMPETENCE IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

The clarion call for librarians and information scientists to adopt and adjust to the challenges posed by the New Order in the utilization and provision of library and information services cannot be over stressed. The information society expects so much information and communication technology (ICT) from librarian to hold on to their professional values in order to facilitate the continuous exploitation of the content of the library collection regardless of the medium in which that content is held. Etim (2004) observed that, the library profession has gone through a ~~lot~~ of transformations from the ancient libraries through medieval libraries up to the present 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is quite interesting to note that the librarians role has changed from the custodian of books to the provider of books and processor of information to information seekers.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has now changed both library and the task of the librarian by expansion rather than by constraint. The skills of information storage, organization, analysis and retrieval associated with librarians have now <sup>been</sup> re-defined <sup>and</sup> librarians now need new competences to be able to be relevant in the information age. For the reason, <sup>now</sup> knowing <sup>how</sup> to generate electronic information and accessed existing data calls for a high level of a librarian's computer literacy competence to be able to provide the needed information to users. When librarians are literate in computer operations, they will be conscious of the fact that the technology driven libraries of today would most likely lead to a situation in which those without technological skills would be rendered redundant without having nothing to offer whatsoever to contribute to the growth of the information society for posterity sake.

It is obvious that, the prevailing level of professional practice globally places a demand on all librarians to equip themselves with the requisite computer skills of acting as navigators in the provision of information services in Nigerian University Libraries. The impact of information and communication (ICT) on the operations of library services underscores the importance of the effective use of information, the techniques by which information is processed, managed, communicated and the dissemination of information services in Nigerian University Libraries.

## **IMPACT OF COMPUTER LITERACY ON NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

The introduction of Internet into library services in recent times has greatly enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of provision library services. Librarians who are computer literate now perform their role with ease. To emphasize the imperativeness of embracing information technology, Adediji (2002) describes a librarian as a mere "Courier" that has to be contented with whichever way information is packaged. He states that the librarian is a middleman (who) neither provide information nor consumed it, he / she merely transfers it in the form in which it is made available to him and in which the user wants it.

Considering the meaning of computer literacy for librarians implies that the demand for computer related skills has moved from insignificant to critical for most academic library positions. One of the most felt impact on Nigerian University Libraries is the increased emphasis on training Nigerian University Libraries must as a matter of need increase the degree of available opportunities meant for computer training for staff. This could be done either through in-house training or staff attendance of outside workshops, which must be an integral part of the library staff development. If training is made an integral part of the library mission, the Nigerian University Libraries should be aggressive at adopting computer literacy and be will to dedicate both their human and financial resources toward that direction. Nigerian University Libraries must also be able to keep up with technological changes. Training should equally be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury, as mandatory, not voluntary; and as well as comprehensive, not superficial. Alabi (2003) observed that, since 1962 when the National Universities Commission (NUC) was set up following the recommendation of the Ashby Commission, the NUC has been supervising and coordinating the activities of all the Universities in Nigeria. The Commission has played a major role in the success of the computer literacy programmes in universities. The computer literacy programmes at the universities has been directed at establishing and entrenching computer center that permeates all activities in the Universities. Each University was requested to set up an MIS committee with membership specified by the NUC. This was to be followed by training among others the librarians.

With adequate acquisition of computer skill, librarians are expected to function completely within their sphere of authority by ensuring efficient flow and distribution of information materials to its ultimate users. Oton (2003) had further observed that one inescapable reality is that as the size of information and its availability through internet increases, users are finding it extremely difficult to locate information sources

and to access it through the web is complicated and not so friendly computer networks, information specialists namely librarians in Nigerian must wake up from their age-long slumber and take the challenge of becoming the prime workers of the Nigerian Information Technology Industry by creating smooth access to data. As electronic navigators and scavengers, librarians now and in the future are expected by virtue of their computer literacy competence and availability of innovations of such machines that can scan, digitize and store permanently every text ever created to perform creditable in their information search for users.

### **BASIC ROLES OF LIBRARIANS IN AUTOMATED LIBRARIES**

Training for librarians in ICT must include more than the basics for librarians to perform the basic roles in automated libraries, there must be continual effort for skill improvement. It must be a matter of priority for computer literacy among the staff. This must be so because technology changes along with time and it is only the better trained staff who can handle those changes. Today Patrons expect their libraries to provide technological information solutions both on and offsite. In turn, librarians need to be ready to learn new emerging techniques and tools in order to provide training onsite or online, develop new programs or services as part of a team, or learn how a particular piece of hardware or software works. Despite the fact that there are presently many computer installations in Nigerian Universities, the awareness of the potentials of these computers and their relevance to our national development and well-being is just emerging (Alabi 2003: 41).

In line with the above, Adediji (2002) further asserts that librarians are required to take on roles requiring a broader range of skills than ever before. This by implication means that library managers need to address how the right staff can be obtained, trained and re-trained in view of the competitive market. Expanding on these roles Adediji (2004) further reflected on Pin-filed submissions who identified some specialized roles for librarians in the emerging electronic library environment. These are:

- Multi-media user comfortable with a wide range of formats
- Intermediary – with a good knowledge of sources and user requirement
- Enabler- pro-actively connecting user with information they require
- Metadata producer – creating records of information sources in a variety of schemes.
- Communicator – formally and informally liaising with users
- Team player – working with colleagues in libraries, IT services and academics.



- Trainer, educator – taking on a formal role to teach information skills and information literacy.
- Evaluator – sifting free and paid for resources on behalf of users.
- Negotiator – dealing with publishers and suppliers.
- Project manager – leading on development projects to enhance the services
- Innovators – not just following the routine but also looking at improved ways to deliver the services
- Fund –raiser – working for greater income from the institution and beyond.

And these roles in conjunction with Minnesota Voluntary Library Certification Program require a wide range of new or enhanced skills which include hardware skills (technical) and software skills (such as vision):

- Profession skills
- Technical and IT Skill
- Flexibility
- Ability to learn quickly
- Ability to work under pressure
- Communication skills
- Negotiating skills
- People skills
- Presentation skills
- Teaching skills
- Team working skills
- Customer service skills
- Analytical and evaluative skills
- Project management skills
- Vision
- Ability to demonstrate a basic understanding of the role technology plays in the creation retrieval and delivery of library resources functions and services.
- Ability to incorporate computer based resources and new technology in library services
- Ability to demonstrate basic skills in the use of audio-visual equipment
- Ability to demonstrate knowledge and use of appropriate computer hardware and software applications for library functions and services.

- Ability to use basic reference, information and referral resources.
- Ability to use the entire library collection to satisfy user requests
- Ability to instruct user on the use of library materials and equipments
- Ability to describe how people communicate needs search for information and receive information.
- Ability to demonstrate knowledge of basic computer operations needed to use the local system, and
- Ability to incorporate appropriate new technologies into technical services functions.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The society expects use (Librarians) to hold on tight to our Professional values and to facilitate the exploitation of the content of the library collection regardless of the medium in which that content is held. It is of a necessity that librarians be computer literate with the continuing increase of reliance on computers and networks, librarians need to be able to adapt to this ever-changing technology. Achieving the target level of computer literacy is not a hard goal to accomplish if there is commitment on the part of the universities and librarians. Achieving library – wide baseline literacy is only the beginning, continuous training helps to create a more adaptable workforce.

In order to maintain their traditional role as information provider, it is hereby recommended that Nigerian University librarians should adopt new strategies for getting hooked to the new systems associated with ICT facilities and sensitizing government to appreciate the importance of library and information services in University libraries.

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