Emerging Issues in Nigerian University Libraries

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Abstract

This paper reviewed emerging issues in Nigerian university libraries. This includes retrospective conversion and housekeeping operations; digitization of local information resources, electronic databases, development and use of software, resources sharing and online reference services, academic status of librarians, in-house publication and subject specialization. The challenges of the emerging issues in Nigerian university libraries are funding, digital divide among libraries, delay in journal publications, ICT skills, erratic power supply. Recommendations were proffered which include increase in the university library budget, accessibility and use of ICT by clients, continuous training programme for library personnel and provision of standby generating plant in every university library.

Key words: Trends, 21st Century, Nigeria, universities, libraries

Introduction

In an examination of the emerging trends in Nigerian university libraries, it is more or less of examining the 21st century librarianship in Nigeria. This era is characterized by the use of ICT to provide library and information services. However, the history of libraries globally can be traced from the three era: ancient, medieval and modern times (Aina, 2004). The modern time is what is referred to as the information age. The information age has revolutioned the provision of library services through the integration and use of ICT facilities.

One of the emerging issues in Nigerian libraries is the computerization/ retrospective conversion exercises in university libraries. According to Nock (2004), the computerization of university libraries began in 1970s though, concerted effort commenced in the late 1990s. University libraries such as Kenneth Dike Library of University of Ibadan and Bayero University, Kano were not left out in the automation/retrospective conversion exercises (Igbeka 2005; Ahmed, 2009).With the introduction of ICT in libraries, librarians of today are not only custodians of information resources but are responsible for making the resources available for users (Okafor and Ukwoma, 2010).

With the frequent and complex demand of information and the introduction of new courses/programmes in universities, various sections or units have been created in the university libraries to cater for users' information needs. However, librarianship in the 21st century has gone beyond working in the four-walls of university libraries such that various job opportunities now exist outside the library. This may be one of the reasons why Nigerian library schools are now restructuring and modifying their curriculum so that their products can meet the job market demand.

Considering the demographic issue in librarianship in Nigeria, the utilization of ICT by librarians based on gender and working experience in Nigerian universities are faced with several challenges which include: funding, erratic power supply, poor maintenance culture and lack of expertise (Igun, 2009).

Emerging Issues

There were remarkable development, in the 21st century Librarianship particularly in Nigerian universities. These development/emerging issues are discussed below:

Retrospective Conversion Exercise/Housekeeping Operations

The retrospective conversion exercises are carried out as the operation that involves converting the paper records of catalogue cards into machine readable cataloguing (MARC) computer system which form the

total database (Ahmed, 2009). Digitization of local information resources (especially theses) in Nigerian university libraries are currently carried out. Examples of such universities are University of Jos, Ahmadu Bello University, (ABU) Zaria, University of Ibadan; University of Nigeria, Nsukka, etc (Saka, 2011).

Traditional/manual library operations such as acquisition, cataloguing and circulation are now carried out through the use of ICT facilities. The automated system enables libraries to acquire resources in terms of ordering, receipting and invoicing E.g. Federal University of Technology, Minna is currently embarking on online selection, subscription and ordering of information resources. This is achieved through online catalogue searching of publishers, book sellers and vendors websites thereby saving the cost involved in the acquisition process. The automated cataloguing system enables users to search resources with their location while resources of other libraries are searched through Online Public Access Catalogue (Ezeani, 2010). The automated circulation help user to have information on borrowers' status, the type of materials on loan and/or out of circulation (Ezeani, 2010).

Digitization of Projects and Theses in Nigerian University libraries

The current trend in Nigerian university libraries is the digitization of projects/theses resources generated over the years. Some of the Nigerian university libraries such as A.B.U., Zaria; University of Ibadan; University of Jos; University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Bayero University, Kano have so far digitized a good number of undergraduate projects and theses and thus lead to creation of databases for theses. Apart from the creation of databases, digitization serve as a means of preserving the original copes of the theses (Saka, 2011). A study on challenges of digitizing information resources in Nigerian university libraries conducted by Imo and Igbo (2011), revealed that theses and dissertations, conference/seminar papers and journal articles formed the majority of resources digitized across the five surveyed university libraries. Infrastructural facilities used in digitization include computer, scanning machine, printers, etc (Imo and Igbo, 2011).

Creation of Electronic Database for Information accessibility

The advent of ICT has now modified the mode of resource acquisition, accessibility and use. Electronic database involve the use of computer to assemble, organize and gather information resources or information in a single location of a computer system. Databases are of two kinds: bibliographic and full text databases. The research conducted by Abubakar and Saka (2009) showed that the electronic databases available in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Ibadan and University of Nigeria, Nsukka include: AGORA, MEDLINE, EBSCO HOST, LISA, HIWARI, ERIC, JSTOR and INASP. However, the above listed electronic databases were easily accessed by users (Abubakar and Saka, 2009).

Academic Status of Librarians

Librarians in Nigerians universities enjoy equal academic status/benefits like their counterparts (faculty members) undertaking teaching and research functions as well as scholarly contributing to knowledge. By this, librarians working in university libraries have the option to publish or perish as well as developing themselves through formal education; seminars, attending workshops and conference;. Edibo (2008) posited that academic librarians in universities world-wide enjoy equal academic status like the faculty members but must fulfill certain conditions in order to be promoted. This has created difficulties for most of the librarians to progress in their career.

The table below specifies the academic librarians' rank equivalent to faculty members as used in most Nigerian universities:

Academic Librarians Rank	Faculty Members (Lecturers) Ranks	Grade Level (CONUAS)
University Librarian	Professor	7
Deputy University Librarian	Associate Professor (Reader)	6
Principal Librarian	Senior Lecturer	5
Senior Librarian	Lecturer I	4.
Librarian I	Lecturer II	3
Librarian II	Assistant Lecturer	2
Assistant Librarian	Graduate Assistant	1

In-house Journal Publication

Nigerian University libraries over the years have initiated the in-house journal publication through articles received from outsiders. Examples of such university libraries include those of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Mkar, etc. Enugu State University of Science and Technology library publishes a journal titled "Nigerian Library Link"; Kashim Ibrahim Library of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria publishes Zaria Journal of Librarianship now changed to Library and Information Management Forum. Other university libraries include: Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and has published the latest issue (volume 3 in 2011)in a journal called "Journal of Applied Information Science and Technology (JAIST)", University of Mkar (a private university) in Benue State publishes a journal called "Nigerian Journal of Library and Information Science".

Development and Use of Software Packages in Nigeria Libraries

Software is set of instructions, guidelines designed to enable computer perform its operations. ALICE software was produced by Softlink; a popular software in United Kingdom and used by Ahmadu Bello Library Complex, Zaria (Nock, 2004). TIN LIB was designed by World Bank and donated to Federal Universities in Nigeria in 1992 to be used for automation purposes. X-LIB was designed and developed by Raw Material Research and Development Council, Abuja and is mostly used in Polytechnic Libraries. Micro CDS/ISIS was designed by UNESCO and used in managing resources in the Agric Research Libraries in Nigeria. Above all, CDS/ISIS is used for database management in some Nigeria university libraries (Sado, 2012).

Library Cooperation and Resource Sharing

No library is sufficient in terms of information resources at its disposal. ICTs are now used by academic and research libraries to embark on cooperative acquisition so as to not only acquire but share resources for optimum access and use by the users. According to Anasi and Ali (2011), the most form of cooperation in Nigerian university libraries in terms of resource sharing is the acquisition process. It was reported by Nwegbu, Echezona and Obijwdo (2011) that interlibrary lending and document delivery, resource access to electronic database, information service as well as training resources and expertise were the areas of resource sharing among Federal and State Universities in both Anambra and Enugu State respectively.

Online Reference Services

Reference service is the establishment of contact between the reference librarian and user with a view of providing the right information to user's request at the right time. The advent of ICT has revolutionized the form of reference service provision by which Onuoha (2012) posited that the current trends in reference service include: Electronic-mail reference service, chat reference service, web content centre, video conference and teleconferencing/video conferencing.

Subject Specialization

The librarianship in Nigeria is moving towards subject specialization rather than pure librarianship particularly in the university libraries. This is based on the sections or departments within the university library system. For example, University of Jos library have the following divisions: Education, Science, Law, Agriculture, Information Technology, Natural Science, etc.

The reality of the subject specialization is such that the heads of divisions in most cases have background qualification related to such division. A law library for example should be headed by librarian with a degree or diploma in Law. This also applies to other subject fields. Another aspect leading to subject specialization in librarianship is that at undergraduate level, students are required to take some of number of credit unit courses from any department within the university. For example interaction with a colleague in A.B.U., Zaria Library school revealed that undergraduate students are required to offer 20 credit units (called cognate courses) from either Faculties of Agriculture, Arts, Social Science, etc before graduation and any seven (7) credit unit called unrestricted elective course from any department within the university. For Direct Entry candidate with Diploma and NCE background are made to take the cognate courses in their particular field or related field. The knowledge gain from these cognate courses would help the undergraduate in rendering various library and information services (collection development, catalogue and classification, reference services, etc) in any library they find themselves.

Problems and Challenges

As earlier pointed out, the emerging issues are mostly characterized by the use of ICT facilities in Nigeria libraries. As such some of the problems and challenges emanating from the use of ICT facilities and modification of other library services in Nigerian universities include the following:

1. **Funding**

    Many writers of ICT utilization in Nigeria libraries extensively emphasized on funding as an inhibiting factor. Inadequate funding has affected the full implementation of ICT in Nigeria libraries (Ezeani, 2010; Onuoha, 2012, Imo and Igbo, 2011). What is your own opinion?

2. **Digital divide among Nigerian university libraries**

    The phenomenon can be referred to as inequitable access to provision and utilization of ICT more especially among Nigerian Libraries as cited by Ahiauzu (2008) in Ani, Esin and Edem (2005) that there is availability and utilization of ICT in Federal universities than in their state universities counterparts.

3. **ICT Skills:** Some library personnel in Nigerianuniversity libraries lack adequate skills to access information. This means that the level of ICT skills of some library personnel is low (Onwudingo& Okeke, 2008; Ampka Abba, 2009).

4. Erratic power supply is a nation-wide problem and has affected full implementation of ICT in most Nigerian libraries (Okoye, 2007) as not all libraries can afford stand-by-generating plant. Constant change from NEPA to generating plant and vice-versa lead to loss of data and system errors (Bozimo, 2005).

5. There is long delay in the publication of journals by the university libraries. This   because the manuscript has to undergo various processes (submission, peer   review, editorialand publication). These processes takes longer time.

6. With the academic status accorded to librarians in Nigerian universities, they are faced with challenges of scholarly contribution to knowledge (journal, conference paper write-ups). Some academic librarians find it difficult to write scholarly papers in reportable journals, while those published in some journals are not accepted by the external assessors of appointment and promotion committee due to non- compliance to the rules of governing the promotion in universities by the authors or writers.

Conclusion

It is clear that the emerging issue in Nigerian university libraries are typical characteristics of the 21stcentury which differentiate them from those of 19th and 20th centuries. Majority of the trends are on ICT aspects while other trends are modifications of other library services.

Recommendations

While ICT has revolutionized the library operations and services, they are still faced with some challenges in Nigerian university libraries. The existence of these challenges serve as bottleneck to their operations. This paper therefore, proffers the following suggestions:-

1. The management of Nigerian university libraries should increase the university library budget and commit more funds for the procurement of ICT facilities in libraries.

2. As for digital divide, library should be ICT inclined. There should be no discrimination in the provision of ICT facilities in Nigerian libraries.

3. Timely and regular ICT training programme should be organized for all library personnel while library schools in Nigeria should endeavour to equip their ICT laboratories for practical training of undergraduates.

4. Adequate stand-by-generating plants should be made available for all university libraries in Nigeria.

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