PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY LIBRARIANS IN THE UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Fatimah Abub Umar
Library Department,
Federal College of Education,
Okene, Kogi State.

Abstract
The focus of this paper is based on the problems encountered by Librarians in the utilization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in academic libraries in Nigeria. It examined the attitudes of Librarians towards advanced technology. It also highlighted the basic functions of ICT. In Pursuit of the focus of this paper; it examines some basic strategies for the enhancement of ICT utilization, benefit of training Academic Librarians for ICT and some challenges that limit the utilization of ICT in academic libraries. Such challenges include lack of ICT literacy, absence of ICT in the curriculum of local library schools, inadequate ICT facilities, and low bandwidth. Finally, among others, the paper recommends that librarians should take training serious to allay the fears and anxiety about the use and application of ICT and basic ICT should be included in the curriculum of local library schools.

Key words: ICT, Utilization, Academic Libraries, Digital Library, Librarians.

The introduction of information communication technologies (ICTs) since the beginning of the 20th century has been rendering manual-based libraries less relevant. This is because using and implementing information communication technology in the library services depend largely on the attitude of librarian toward this advanced technology. Significant changes have taken place in libraries in the developed countries and in some developing countries due to the application of ICTs in cataloguing, circulation control, electronic document delivery, and Local-Host Library Service databases. Eguavoen (2011) asserted that developments like expert systems, wireless networks, virtual collections, interactive web interfaces, virtual reference services, and personal web portals bring about greater changes since the start of the new millennium. The researcher added that, there are significant and fast changes occurring in librarianship, where ICTs are being established to complement e-libraries and in some cases to completely replace the traditional libraries. Academic Libraries are part of educational system in Nigeria. These libraries support the objectives of educational
system which include teaching, learning and research at high levels. They are also the heart of the intellectual life of academic communities in Nigeria. Agbola (2005) declared that Academic Libraries are important components of Educational Institutions. This is because no academic excellence will be achieved without a good library to back up teaching, research and other community service mandates. Today, in this information advanced technology age, Academic Libraries are no longer confirmed to buildings on campuses but they are a new hybrid learning spaces, serving a far broad purpose. They contain documents in organized electronic forms, available on the internet. Mayo (2001) noted that the internet has emerged as the most powerful tool for and instant access to information. With the internet, information is just a finger touch away from the user. It is the world’s most efficient means of communication, very cheap, available and with vast amounts of information materials accessible anytime of the day.

Guiding & Murray (2004) argued that technological change is posing a particular challenge to librarians in developing countries such as Nigeria. Librarians in developed countries moved quickly to learn and adopt new information technologies (Ramzan, 2004). ICT was introduced to perform library functions and provide innovative user services. Librarians gained knowledge of new technologies through continuing education programs, professional training, and revisions to library school curricula, which helped them benefit from the new technologies. Their libraries became equipped with appropriate hardware and software (Ramzan, 2004). The story in developing nations is quite different. Ramzan (2004) has described the situation in Pakistan and other developing countries like Nigeria. He observes that librarians in Pakistan were not prepared to embrace the changes forced on them by new technologies; and that most of them were uncertain about ICT applications in their libraries and benefits for their organizations, because they had little knowledge of ICT. The problems associated with this lack of knowledge are also discussed by Haider (2006). This study will explore attitudes of librarians in Nigeria towards ICT in their libraries.

Anozie (2009) defines information communication technology (ICT) as the technology required for information processing. In particular, it is the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit and retrieve information. Information is rooted in information technology, telecommunications and the media. Adeyoyin (2005) agrees with the Anozie’ definition that ICT is a tool for information processing put it as - the acquisition, processing, storage, and dissemination of information by means of computers and other telecommunication equipment. A library is set up to satisfy the information needs of its clientele, where a librarian uses the ICT tools to acquire, organize and disseminate the information to the users. Therefore, the ability to define, access, manage, evaluate, integrate, create and communicate information using ICT tools in the ICT environment
forms the overall perception of ICT literacy. Edem (2008) in his own view, conceptually presented ICT literacy in three dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitude. Knowledge refers to foundational knowledge, skills to technical skills and attitude to critical assessment skills. The information society and the globalized world require ICT literate individuals to prosper.

Digitization has forced us to think somewhat differently about libraries, especially academic libraries (Anyakoha, 2004). As operation of change due to advance technologically development and digitization initiative, librarians as information managers, professional and gatekeepers are also expected to be part and champions of this change. Librarians of today are expected to possess additional knowledge and skills to work within the electronic library information world, thus they are faced with the challenges of acquiring advanced knowledge and skills to augment what they traditionally learnt. Also the challenges of producing quality and efficient services via the internet as against the traditional manual methods of library operation have posed a big challenge to information provision. To overcome these challenges, Edem (2008) opined that librarians are expected to continuously enhance their knowledge, skills and personal characteristics in the use of technologies in order to improve productivity, efficiency and competitiveness. Acquiring these skills and related library operation characteristics, does not mean that the traditional manual training received and acquired should be thrown away but rather, it should be improved upon to enable librarians play a vital role in the new information technology environment. Edem (2008) also suggests that training librarians for electronic library services will help them have a sense of belonging in the world of advanced technology thereby reducing the risk of technophobia among librarians.

**Attitudes of Librarians towards Advanced Technology**

A study carried out by Craghill, Neale & Wilson (2005) investigated the impact of information communication technology (ICT) on staff deployment in UK public libraries and found that the introduction of ICT had been a positive experience in general, although some staff had found it to be an initial barrier. The authors suggested that all librarians would need to have a positive attitude towards the use of ICT in future” It should be noted that there are many variables which seem to have or influence on the attitude of the librarians towards the use of ICT. In the light of this, Eguavoen (2011) noted some of this variable as age, gender, prior knowledge/training, anxiety, and educational qualification. Implementing information communication technology (ICT) in the electronic library depends largely on the attitudes of librarians to its usage. The application of ICT has caused significant changes in libraries: such as cataloguing, circulation, information retrieval, electronic document delivery, and CD-ROM databases. Ramzan (2004) observes that expert systems, wireless networks, virtual
collections, interactive Web interfaces, virtual reference services, and personal Web portals have brought changes since the start of the new millennium. There have been fast and significant changes in librarianship, where digital and electronic libraries complement, and in some cases replace, traditional libraries (Eguavoen, 2011).

**Basic Functions of ICT in Academic Libraries**

Nweke, Yakub & Omale (2012: page 17-20), outlines the following basic functions of ICT which may also be useful in the establishment and management of ICT in Nigeria. ICT is used to:

- Create easy access to a wide range of information in all disciplines.
- Provide services suitable for a library of the 21st century, including making information readily available through electronic library.
- Provide researchers with enough periodicals and books in the library.
- Provide a digital museum where digital images are edited and processed for virtual exhibition space.
- Make access for magazine articles, books, papers, images, sound files and videos possible online.
- Enable the users to directly access electronic data via telecommunications networks.

**Strategies for the Enhancement of ICT Utilization**

In pursuance of staff development, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has been making efforts to sponsor Academic Librarians abroad on ICT training. In recognition of this Castelyn (2005) suggested that the commission and other government organizations such as Education Trust Fund (ETF), should fulfil their own terms of reference of sponsoring short training courses abroad for librarians especially on ICT. They equally noted that they should provide increased fund for Academic Librarians, self-reliant training in ICT, even if it is on a part-time basis. Professionals engaged in library and information services have to develop new indexing methods and evaluate techniques to tap the information from the internet. They also mentioned that there is a need for a retraining of traditionally trained classifiers and cataloguers in the ICT environment in order to remain relevant in this day of information society. Igun (2006) recommended that the training of the librarians for the 21st century must follow cooperative education which emphasizes knowledge and acquisition of work-related skills and competencies and practices in relevant workplaces. She pointed out that this will remedy the theoretical knowledge and skill gap. She also reiterated that formal system produces people with facts and theoretical knowledge but limited practical skills and the apprenticeship (informal) system which produces people with limited practical skills and no theoretical knowledge. Jordan (2003) in stressing the need for in-service programs for librarians from developing countries noted the need for customizing the
training of each individual or group, so that a match is achieved between what they need to learn and what they actually undertake during the training period. It will help both the trainer and the trainees to achieve an enhanced workshop experience tailored to the trainer's needs.

Castelyn (2005) advocated the designing of specific training programs in the use of ICT in order to meet the educational needs of information professionals, such as archivists, librarians and museum professionals. It also stated that training of information professionals should focus not only on new methods and techniques for the development and provision of information and communication services, but also on relevant management skills to ensure the best use of technologies. It entreated library associations and libraries to prepare a written proposal for their governments to benefit from these suggestions. Lwoga (2009) noted that some academic libraries like the library of the University of Darusalam (UDSM), uses newsletters, UDSM website, posters, staff circular, notice boards and the University FM radio to publicize its ICT programmes. They also emphasized that the University offers consultancy services to her various campuses and community at large. However, Pond (2009) advocated the use of evidence-based librarianship technique to enhance and improve ICT training programmes in developing countries. This is a pre-training assessment tool to use with professional librarians in developing countries, in ICT training and utilization. It helps both the trainee and the trainer to assure the most efficient use of resources of money and time. Chiware (2007) was of the opinion that the success of African University libraries in the digital age depends on the adequate training on ICT to initiate and manage digital resources. He emphasized that this can be achieved through formal education in library and information science and as part of continuing education for staff.

Lwoga (2009) stated that Academic Libraries should promote ICT expertise to develop software and hardware to support the local needs. They should adapt, maintain, customize and configure existing ICT solutions to their specific requirement. Still considering the need for lasting solution to favourable training strategies, Castelyn (2005) suggested some strategies that will help promote digital literacy and utilization. Among the mare: formal education through inclusion of a favourable environment for learning ICT in library school curriculum and creating a favourable environment for learning ICT competencies; innovative strategies and or intuitive learning strategy/enjoyment strategy through video games; parallel literacy strategies through the spread of more modern telephone systems, development of interactive digital television; and the convergence of audiovisual media and the internet connection equipment and multimedia facilities; and the involvement strategies through NGOs, government, private companies, universities, research institutes and others.
Benefits of Training Academic Librarians for ICT

ICT came through digitization which Wikipedia said it resulted to libraries in which collections are stored in digital formats and accessible by computers. Its content can be stored locally and accessed remotely through computer networks. Of course, it is a type of information retrieval system. The major advantage of ICT is that it makes research easier for both students and intellectually curious alike (Mayo, 2001). Notwithstanding, the benefits of training Academic Librarians for ICT cannot be either rated or overemphasized especially in this new advanced technology age where librarians role have changed from traditional sources of information to technology source and also with a large number of self-improvement training facilities which can be accessible online with the involvement of a minimum number of training personnel. Confirming the above statement, Mayo (2001) states that these innovations have made possible a wide range of class-related activities in the cybercafé and it is now possible to get training anyway and anytime. In a similar study, Anozie (2009: page 32-38) enumerates some of the benefits of Training Academic Librarians as follows:

- Training helps employees to learn their job quickly and effectively thereby reducing the cost involved in learning.
- It helps librarians to update themselves in their fields of specialization thereby improving in their work performance.
- It serves as a tool used in developing the full potentials or effectiveness of staff in an organization.
- Training result to a skilled workforce.
- Attitude to work by employees can be changed through training.

Hindrances to ICT Maximum Utilization

ICT literacy is a boaster to academic librarians’ work life. However, many problems have been obstruction towards maximum utilization of this ICT. Jordan (2003) suggested that barriers to adequate ICT utilization in developing countries arise from both lack of ICT literacy and the fact that many local library schools fail to integrate ICTs into their curricular. Lwoga (2009) identified the following challenges as hindrances to effective ICT utilization: over-dependency on donor support, low bandwidth, inadequate ICT facilities, underutilization of the few available ICT facilities, inadequate ICT training and failure to retain ICT manpower. Chiware (2007) noted that digital age is a reality and academic libraries face many challenges in the implementation of ICT or digital library project. These include funding, human resources, training and retention of skills, internet connectivity, telecommunication infrastructure, and copyright issue. He equally stated that the successful acquisition of ICT literacy skills/competencies depends on the commitment of management and availability of funds, trainers and time for participants to leave their jobs and go for
short courses at given intervals over a long period of time. Attitudes of library schools, individuals and government drawback the enthusiasm of people to utilize ICT literacy.

Ramzan (2004) noted that new recruits in library profession do not have necessary ICT-related knowledge and skills, because of the deficiency of library and information science curricula in the ICT area. This indicates that the problem is from the basic i.e. the library school. Castrlyn (2005) noted that a laissez-faire attitude of lecturers, students and even librarians by feeling that their employers should train them in ICT hinders ICT development and utilization in academic libraries. People should employ self-effort in becoming ICT literate as cybercafés are springing up in every street corner. He also pointed out that the delay in the implementation of government policies on ICT plans retards ICT literacy acquisition and utilization. He cited the non-implementation of the National policy on information Technology with a mission to make Nigeria an ICT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2005... and the provision of National Information Infrastructure - backbone ‘as the gateway to the global information infrastructure. He maintained that as at 2008, the policy was fully implemented and even up till this moment a lot of the policies have been ignored due to changes in government.

Finance has been the backbone of every organizational success and the implementation of the organizational staff development programme. Adeyoyin (2005) identified poor financial provision for staff training and development and conservatism by the older members of the profession to ICT change as major hindrance to ICT literacy acquisition and utilization. Chiware (2007) also attribute lack of fund, infrastructure and skilled professionals to embark on automation of all library management activities and application of ICT as problem of ICT literacy acquisition and utilization. Adeyoyin (2005) recognized poor infrastructural development, funding, ICT skills among staff as problems facing librarians along the road to the 21st century. Igun (2006) pointed some problems of the ICT application in libraries as operational orientation (conservatism), financial constraint, erratic power supply, insufficient computer or ICT literate librarians and lack of political will to implement ICT policies in the country.

**Conclusion**

The application of ICT have greatly improved the efficiency in Library services with the sole aim of enabling the librarians and users to make the most effective use of the resources and services of libraries. But it is still very true that there are still some challenges faced by librarians in the utilization of this ICT. Therefore, it is essential for librarians to keep themselves updated with the use of ICT developments and applications for effective service delivery in Academic Libraries of various institutions.
There is an obvious fact to say that in Africa, especially in Nigeria, we must be ready to bridge the ICT gap in order to ensure maximum utilization.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations have been made:

• Academic Librarians should take training serious and avail themselves of every opportunity to train and be retrained so as to upgrade their skills.

• Academic Library Authority should improve and modernize their curriculum by adding ICT courses to impact digital skills to the future librarians thereby giving them a foundational platform for the mastery of these skills even in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in higher institutions.

• Academic Librarians and students should personally utilize a large number of self-improvement training facilities online.

• Nigerian Library Association and other related agencies should organize regular and affordable annual training for her members in order to train and keep them a breast with the new digital skills and development in the profession.

• Government and non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to intervene and support academic libraries with funds so as to accelerate the training and retraining of Librarians for ICT proper utilization.

References


