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The Role of Information and Communication Technology as a Tool for Change in University Libraries

By
Usman A. Saliu*

Introduction

Indeed, the library is the nerve centre of any university. Thus as a resource center, it occupies the central and primary place because it supports all the teaching, learning and research, function of a university. According to Aguolu (1993) the university libraries assist the universities in the discharge of their functions by acquiring all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning, research and public service functions of the universities. Therefore, the extent to which a library performs these functions depends on a number of factors which include adequate information resources, qualified personnel, adequate accommodation and availability of funds. The situation in Nigerian university libraries has been that of inability to provide the basic requirements for an effective discharge of

* Usman A. Saliu is with the University of Ilorin Library, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State.

these duties. In the face of all these, the current demand of the contemporary society coupled with the present day innovation - factor of electronic libraries, have not been met by the libraries.

While academic libraries in Nigeria are compelled to join the race in the provision of information resources electronically so that both the students and staff can benefit from a wide range of current global information. In one sense, Daniel (2000) stated that the world is witnessing a wave of revolution on information technology. Catalytic changes are taking place every day as a result of the application of information technology on the man's affairs. And, there is a gradual revolution that is changing the world into what has variously been described as an "Information Society". Consequently information is now been considered as the most relevant factor in the process of a world economy that is now gradually becoming globalized.

The computerization of library services in Nigeria has been long overdue and is now inevitable. The number of publications and volumes of information available in the world are daily increasing at a rapid rate. It is a fact that no research or teaching activity is possible without access to archival and historical as well finding(s) records and the latest research work.

At one end of the spectrum, library automation can be referred to as the use of computer and associated technology to do exactly what has always been done manually in libraries with the justification of reduced cost and increased performance. At the other end of the spectrum, library automation can be viewed as the use of computer and associated technology to revolutionise the meaning of libraries and to decline their existence. The computer and telecommunications technologies' impact has permeated

every aspect of the human society all over the world.

Librarianship is a mission-oriented field involving clients. It is the provision of recorded discourse to users, which provides a constant focus within the dynamic of change mechanism. By extension, this mission involves those intellectual and operational responses associated with the acquisition, content and use of recorded discourse. The computer is a device that accepts data in one form and processes it to produce data in another form. Computers are tools used in processing and deriving information recorded and retrieved in the fastest possible time for subsequent use by decision makers at various levels of the decision-making process. However, Information Technology (I.T) is a general expression covering computer, telecommunication and electronics technology. There is little doubt that I.T is not having a profound influence on all aspects of life, organisation and Management Information System (MIS).

Concept of Social Change

Life involves change and we grow into a particular way of life in our societies. But as the years go by change in the way of life begins to take place. Most often, individuals and societies adjust to major and minor changes that are taking place or the level of its impact. It is believed that a society that resists change (gradual or revolutionary) will soon be left undeveloped compared to the societies that adjust to the promptings of change. However, it is enough to say that social change theories are postulated based on the situations that the scholars found themselves.

There are as many explanations on the concept of social change as there are authors on the subject. The Encyclopedia of the Social Science defines the concept as

the significant alteration of social structures, (that is the pattern of social action and interaction) including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct) values, and cultural products and symbols. This definition takes into cognizance gradual and revolutionary change, technical or social inventions and culture alteration. According to the new Encyclopedia International (1975), social change consists of the modification of society and culture through time. The modification is in social institutions, ideas, values, technology and other products of human interaction. Bryson (1990) sees change as “an alteration in the relationship or environment of one. This definition includes changes taking place in the organisation. It is clear from the definitions that social change in its basic sense means change in social structure and, within the framework of such structural changes, one identifies a number of factors namely; changes in institutions, changes in tools, changes in value, changes in attitudes and changes in personnel.

Information Technology and Libraries

Like any other human endeavour, libraries have been experiencing considerable changes. These changes are, however, more pronounced in special and university libraries. Such changes affect not only how the libraries are managed but also the services that they rendered.

Jegade (1990) has argued that the use of technology has formed the basis for progress in all areas of human endeavour. In other words, each improvement on standards of living depends largely on the advances of technologies in that society, what society achieves largely depends on the technology available to it.

A. Ayo opined that Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T) is one of the most potent forces shaping

the twenty first century. Its revolutionary impact changes and improves the society tremendously. In this present information age, it is generally agreed that information is the communication of knowledge. There is also a common aphorism that says, "Knowledge is Power". The essence of I.C.T. is the power to help individuals and societies achieve greater access to knowledge and ideas for the benefit of humanity. I.C.T. further favours a new, easy and better method of carrying out a number of library operations. Old services have consequently been displaced by new proactive services.

According to Abiolu and Okere the library is traditionally regarded as an institution that manages information in print format. In current times there is a wave of change and libraries have not only expanded their formats to electronic and digital formats, but also their roles. They are no longer just custodians of book depositors, today's librarian is a specialist and answers a variety of names such as "information manager", "information scientist", "knowledge manager", "indexer", "cataloguer", and a host of other specialized and highly technical "versions" of professionals. The fast evolving economy, the knowledge society, globalization and technological innovations have brought to the fore, the role of information in every facet of human society. Today, there is e-banking, e-library, e-voting and indeed, there is anticipation of a paperless society. The library now as ever remains the most democratic of institutions. The library goal has been universal access to information to the literate and non literate; to the poor and rich. The library remains the most dedicated to ensuring that correct, unbiased information reaches all and sundry.

Libraries have come a long way since the last two decades when communications were via telex or post. Libraries are now in a truly electronic age and the

preoccupation is to constantly expand and harness knowledge. The emergence of capturing technologies such as mini computers with input devices that collect and convert information into electronic format with powerful devices to store and retrieve information such as hard disks, floppy disks, optical disks and smart cards have revolutionized today's information management.

J.E. Rowley stresses that the information retrieval applications of the information age were originally designed to provide access to information as distinct from documents. In many instances, the devices give access to information on documents. Nigeria, as part of the global society, cannot fail to embrace these technologies. The evolving scenario in which communication is gravitating towards the electronic form, as a substitute for person to person, is already impacting significantly on the way in which information managers relate with their immediate and remote environment.

Concept of Library

According to Chambers Encyclopedia (1975), the word library signifies a place set apart for reading or reference, and by extension, collection of books. It also describes a library as a collection of books and other forms recorded, housed, organized, and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of people for information, knowledge, recreation, aesthetics and enjoyment. O.S. Olanlokun and M.T. Salisu, stated that the library is an agency which engages in the collection, organisation, processing, preservation, and dissemination of recorded information in the various formats most convenient to its target users.

Roles and Functions of Libraries in the Contemporary University

A university is defined by *Encyclopedia International* (1975) as an institution of learning of the highest grade. It is characterized by its emphasis on the compilation and classification of acquired knowledge; the transmission of what is known and the creation of new knowledge. These functions are achieved through the university's teaching, research and publication activities. To help the university achieve these functions, a library is set up with the responsibilities of acquiring, by whatever methods, all the literature required for the achievement of the identified functions. University of academic libraries, therefore, are set up to support the instructional programmes of universities. As a place where teaching and "learning of the highest grade" are conducted, the library provides materials at both levels for the teachers, researchers and the students who are the primary users of the library. In other words, the university libraries are set up to acquire, process, store and make readily available graphical records of the past and present for future consumption.

S.C. Nwoye has highlighted the functions of a university library more eloquently when he asserts that the library helps the university in conserving knowledge and ideas inherited from the past. The library also expands the frontiers of knowledge by providing free access to what is acquired, processed and stored. It is also the function of the library to provide the staff and the students an opportunity for independent work directed as the expansion and advancement of knowledge.

Factors for Social Change in University Libraries

- As we have seen above, societies everywhere undergo continuous change. According to O. Otite and W. Ogionwo,

the north pole is moving to the south at the rate of six inches a year and that the North American continent is also moving away from Europe by as much as twenty inches each year. This means that social change in individuals and society is a must. Technologies and communication tools are two major determinants of change in the university library setting.

Technologies as Tools for Change in the library

Technology innovation evolves as a result of combination of cultural elements. They are new in the sense that new items are put into new relationship. For example, most people are aware of the process of innovation whereby the automobile emerged as a new combination of wheels, steam engine, horse-carriage body and so on. What we want to prove here is that when an established culture meets with another established culture their coexistence and inter-relationship will eventually produce innovation and that is to say, a new set of behaviours. Technology, especially Information Communication Technology (ICT), has been used as a tool for social change. J.A. English-Lueck and her colleagues in a study tried to find out the effects of technology on the family and community:

“We are in an era of computerization in which new technologies like computers and telecommunication systems are being part of our daily life,...the effects of technology on the family an community can only be understand in the details of daily life. Technology is binding the world of work and the world of home in ways that redefine what it means to be in each. Some changes are dramatic others are subtle but the changes are experienced as the mundane activities of everyday life”.

Communication as Tool for Changes in the Library

A primary requisite for the organization of any community is effective mode of communication. There can be no social life or social organization without communication. For people to build and maintain any kind of social order, they must communicate; they must come in contact with one another and this must lead to a transfer of meanings and some degree of mutual understanding. Before a behavioural change takes place, there must be a form of communication either with fellow human beings or with inanimate things (e.g computers TV, Radio Telex, Fax, CDROM, Internet, Online, E-mail etc). Communication is an essential tool in a social change in the library. O t i t e and Ogionwo believe that it is through communication that a social system is held together. The symbolic sharing of human experience is made possible through this process. An essential tool of communications is the language. Language is not just the spoken word but also the written word, which are transmitted by telegraphy, newspapers, magazine, books, films, billboards, drawings, paintings and pictures. The modern tool for conveying these are the computers, televisions, radios, microfiches and other technologies which the library and information centres can exploit.

Tools for Information Technology Services in the Library

The tools are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| - Online searching | - Internet |
| - CD-ROM | - Networking |
| - E-mail and | - Bibliographic Control |

On-Line Searching

This refers to an access technology for centrally storing information. It has telecommunication for access and operates in a Wide Area Network, which accesses the globe through a cluster of data networks. Usually, On-line operates on a pay-and-use basis. On-line searching has added advantages of fast response time, powerful retrieval capabilities such as multiple file searching and scanning many files simultaneously. On-line database search using reviews will serve as useful tools for delivering information service to users.

Internet

The explosion of internet use in the last two years has meant that libraries are increasingly becoming linked to the internet. It is now one of the most important tools for information delivery in the 21st century. The Internet can be described as a worldwide network of computers. Now, all libraries should have fast access to the internet for delivery of information service to users.

CD-Rom

Computer Disk Read only Memory Technology has been available on for about twelve years in Nigeria. According to M.I. Ajibero, the potential of CDROM lies in its storage compactness, portability, reduced shelf space, maintenance cost and durability up to a hundred years. CD-ROM is definitely set to serve as an indispensable tool or technology for delivering information service to users.

Networking or Resource Sharing

James Daniel stated that, with global resource sharing, the principle of one product for one user at one time has

been replaced by networked products that support multiple users simultaneously and allows multiple access to multiple resources from any work station. Obviously, the growth of library network around the world is gradually increasing. This will serve as an important tool for information delivery service in the 21st Century.

E-mail (Electronic Mail)

The E-mail is one of the components of internet connectivity. It is basically used for instant communication. It has the basic features of being connected internationally, and speeds delivery of mails. It provides cheap means communication and effective delivery of information service to users in Nigeria.

Bibliographic Control

According to James Daniel bibliographic control is a sophisticated indexing techniques and bibliographical control, including digital information retrieval. We can browse, scan, and also perform relevance, ranking, keyboard searching automated system etc. This can help in the information delivery service to users in Nigeria in the 21st century.

Problems Militating Against Effective Delivery of Information Technology Services in Libraries

L.I. Ehigiator listed some of the problems militating against the effective delivery of information technology services in Nigeria as follows:-

- (i) Inadequate funding to sustain information technology delivery services in Nigeria.
- (ii) Lack of permanent library building. Most academic libraries do not have permanent library buildings to

be able to provide effective information technology delivery services.

- (iii) Lack of proper planning and implementation of library policy on information technology.
- (iv) Inadequate resources, furniture and equipment.
- (v) Lack of infrastructure/facilities such as electricity, telephone, Computer, Internet etc.
- (vi) Lukewarm attitudes of librarians and information scientists to work with new technology.

Suggestions for Effective Delivery of Information Technology Services

James Daniel enumerated the following steps required for ICT services in Nigerian university libraries:-

- (i) Libraries must direct their intellectual and creative energies towards skill acquisition and mastering of these are of the technologies which enhance professional performance.
- (ii) Library budgets should be reviewed upward in order to meet all the needs of users in the information technology delivery service.
- (iii) Library authorities should embark on training and retraining of their staff to enable them apply modern information technologies to the tasks assigned to them.
- (iv) The Federal and State Governments in Nigeria should provide effective infrastructure in the universities to enable library personnel utilize ICT facilities in their libraries.
- (v) Government should reduce the tariff paid on the importation of ICT equipment so that the facilities will be affordable to the libraries.

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