

CREATING A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH E-LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

The contributions of library services to teachers/lecturers resourcefulness and students' effective learning and development cannot be overemphasized. However, due to population explosions in schools including many tertiary institutions, human congestions, inadequate sitting facilities, uncomfortable stuffy atmospheric condition due to inadequate air conditioner facilities as well as insufficient availability of relevant contemporary study materials for usage characterize many libraries. Without doubt these are negatively affecting the efficiency and resourcefulness of teaching staff as well as students' safety, health, and effectiveness in their learning and development. With the potentialities provided by e-library all these could be properly taken care of. This paper explores the potentialities of e-libraries, shows how e-libraries can help create a safe and healthy environment for effective learning and development, and then highlights some major challenges associated with e-library and its management. In order to proffer solutions to the challenges highlighted some suggestions were made which include: provision of adequate funds to libraries by governments and concerned private bodies, sincerity and accountability from beneficiaries of the funds in terms of utilization, prioritized investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by library managements to support e-library services and provision of effective internet connectivity within the institutions and their environs.

INTRODUCTION

Information and knowledge are key factors to the resourcefulness and quality of teachers/lecturers. To the learners/students, they enable effectiveness and quality in their learning. It is as a result of this that libraries are established in the public and institutions to provide information and services that are essential to learning, development and progress for the purpose of personal development and the society as well. A library is an organized collection of items which may be in form of books, journals, videos, CDROM and other research materials along with the services required to make them available to a given user group or groups. It can also be referred to as a "place" to get information and to get help finding information. The "place" can be physical or virtual or a combination of both (Fabunmi, 2009). There are different types of libraries (Halsey, Moran, Goldberg, Lane, 2008); as a result libraries are used by different people for different purposes, but for students libraries are used to supplement and enhance their classroom experiences, learn skills in locating sources of information, develop good reading and study habits as well as for research work (Halsey et al. 2008). Due to population explosions in schools including many tertiary institutions, what have characterized many libraries today are: human congestions, inadequate sitting facilities, uncomfortable stuffy atmospheric condition due to inadequate air conditioner facilities as well as insufficient availability of relevant contemporary study materials for usage. All these serve as impediments to the quality, efficiency and resourcefulness of teaching staff as well as to students' safety, health, and effectiveness in their learning and development which eventually affect their academic performance. With the potentialities provided by e-library all these could be properly taken care of.

As observed by Ubaru (2005), the quality of education is directly proportional to the quality and availability of study materials. The high cost of procuring books and up-to-date journals has restricted

higher educational institutions to libraries that do not provide sufficient up-to-date materials for updating course materials. Ubaru (2005) further stated that the lack of study materials impairs the ability of teachers and students in the area of research which forms the major activity in educational institutions.

Since the Internet emerged as a mainstream communications medium in the mid-1990s, libraries have provided Internet access in an effort to expand the scope of information available to users (Halsey et al. 2008). With the advent of wireless fidelity (*WiFi*) technology the internet access has further be to outside the libraries for users with laptops, notebooks, and other mobile devices that are internet compliant. There is therefore the need for university libraries in Nigeria to use appropriate technology to access the world information in order to enable Universities carry out their traditional functions of teaching, research and public service effectively and efficiently (Fabunmi, 2009). This paper explores the potentialities of e-libraries, shows how e-libraries can help create a safe and healthy environment for effective learning and development, and then highlights some major challenges associated with e-library and its management. In order to proffer solutions to the challenges highlighted some suggestions were made.

POTENTIALITIES OF E-LIBRARIES

As a result of advancement in ICT and subsequent globalisation, the current trend in librarianship is on-line acquisition process, online cataloguing practices, online reference services and the online circulation services (Ugwuayin, 2009). E-library website which can be accessed freely from the municipal *WiFi* where users can download and upload books, journals, manual etc with proper copyrights at little or no cost. This goes a long way to improve our standard of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) and people can leverage on thesis done, ask questions etc.

E-Library is an online database which allows individuals to take advantage of and to search through a collection of thousands of network-based information and services offered by others which include full-text newspapers, magazines, books and other sources of data that may be internal to a given organization and that which crosses organizational boundaries (Arasomwan, Omeiza, Omwanghe, 2010). E-Library also presents teachers and students the opportunity to make their material and theses available for wider view. E-Library will allow beneficiaries to leverage modern ICT to enhance learning, build computer skills and narrow the digital divide.

Other benefits of e-Library include the following, Ubaru (2005), Fabunmi (2009) and Okiy (2010):

- i. Unlimited opening hours. Patrons can access it at anytime and in anywhere unlike the traditional/physical library whose accessibility is limited to the opening hours.
- ii. Access to resources in the traditional library is limited shelf to search in physical locations while that of e-library is unlimited to shelf and it is electronic.
- iii. The search engine in traditional library is manual and tedious while that of electronic is easy and extensive.
- iv. In the area of time, traditional library is time consuming whereas the e-Library saves time. It saves and/or reduces the physical space taken up by library materials.
- v. Seating space and shelf space is high in physical library while it is low in e-Library.
- vi. Resource sharing is inconvenient and slow in traditional library, whereas it is convenient and fast in e-Library.
- vii. Migration is limited in physical library while it is unlimited in e-Library. It often adds enhanced searching capabilities in a digital format.
- viii. The library materials are available at the user's desktop, regardless of where the user is physically located. It allows for the inclusion of materials only available on the Internet or in digital format. It provides the user with the capability to download and manipulate text.
- ix. It often allows for multiple, concurrent users. It eliminates the problem of a book being missing or off the shelf. It is less labor intensive.

EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH E-LIBRARY

Learner's physical and social surroundings make up his learning environment. Physical surroundings for the student include the library building and instructional materials while social surrounding refers to people involved in the affairs of the school which include learner's teacher, peers and library staff. Learning

environment could affect learners' health and safety psychologically, emotionally and otherwise and the state of a student's health is crucial to his learning. For effective learning and development to take place the learning environment should be conducive and there must be availability of relevant facilities (e.g., books, materials, tools, etc.) and ease of access to these facilities. Advances in technology such as global telecommunication infrastructure, cross border data flow, the Internet, satellite networks and wireless telephones are making learning environment comfortable for contemporary learners. Considered below are factors that affect effective learning and development of students/learners vis-à-vis creating safe and healthy environment through e-library.

- i. *Non-availability of books/materials:* The e-Library supplements the existing traditional library by adding the ability to share resources from other institutions through subscription to online databases.
- ii. *Availability of books only in reference section:* Students are often distressed when the copies of the book they are looking for, only available at the reference section are being used by others. E-library not only provides more resources for students, it also gives them access to the same resources viewable at the same time without conflict.
- iii. Not enough copies of books to borrow: with copies of books available online, e-library creates the possibilities for students not to worry about borrowing books because through any of the internet compliant mobile devices or computers the student can have access to the books.
- iv. *Stress of searching for materials:* Learner's stress is indirectly proportional to his effectiveness in learning and development. Computerization of circulation, cataloguing, serials, multimedia, indexing and abstracting and making them available online to library users will create a stress-free learning environment for the learner, thus improving his effectiveness.
- v. *Misplaced, missing or loss of borrowed book(s):* This could cause a student a lot of destabilization and health problem because a borrower has to replace or pay cash equivalent of borrowed books that are lost. With e-library setup students may not need to physically borrow any book.
- vi. *Insufficient or no availability of relevant contemporary study materials:* By reason of internet technology library users can access services in libraries beyond their own, beyond their country and continent. They can have access to bibliographic records of millions of books and the details of the holdings of academic and research libraries around the world and electronic journals and newsletters are made available on a regular basis. With personal computers, laptops, mobile phones, and other contemporary mobile devices, all these will be a click away from any library users.
- vii. *Human congestions:* This creates uncomfortable stuffy atmospheric environment for library users most especially where there are no adequate air conditioner facilities. This could be hazardous to students' health. With the potentialities provided by e-library, the physical library can be decongested therefore creating comfortable and healthy studying environment for students
- viii. *Inadequate sitting space:* This is what characterizes an average university library most especially in the examination period. In most cases books have to be referenced without borrowing them. What a discomfort it is for a student to stand reading! But in an e-library setup a student with his laptop or mobile phone can comfortably relax somewhere and access the book he needs via the internet. This is also possible in the cyber café.
- ix. *Hiding/hoarding of books:* Some students hide books for subsequent use while some library staff hoards books for reasons best known to them. This without doubt creates uncomfortable learning environment for other library users who may need such materials. This can be reversed through e-library because all books will be scanned into computers and made available to anyone, anywhere over computer networks.
- x. *Cases of distance learners:* Libraries are indispensable in every facet of higher education. Effective library support to distance learners is mandatory for qualitative delivery of instruction and learning. Virtual learning environment created by the integration of ICTs in education upon which e-library thrives can relieve these learners of the risk and stress in trying to have access to a physical library located at a distant place.
- xi. *Student's needs at odd hour:* Odd hour here refers to period(s) when the physical library is not opened for use or times when it is not possible to go to the library. At such times there may be

crucial need for some library books/materials and this could be psychologically and emotionally devastating. With e-learning all the student needs to do is to get connected to the school network of internet and with a click the material needed appears on screen; this is because library services will not be constrained to time of opening and closing hours.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH E-LIBRARY AND ITS MANAGEMENT

The availability of computers in the library determines to some extent the people's interaction and acquisition of ICT knowledge with them. Where they are not, there is no option. Poor ICT infrastructure, lack of interest by the library management and lack of training opportunities hinder the acquisition of ICT literacy skills.

The types of cyber crime in Nigeria are revealed together with the efforts geared towards combating/preventing cyber crime in the country. Nigeria's attention is therefore drawn to the possibility of libraries that offer public internet access service being victims of cyber crime as well as unknown perpetrators. How cyber crime can be brought under control is documented in Adomi and Igun (2008).

High expectations are raised with e-library but when it fails it can be so demotivating and frustrating that people lose confidence in the ability of libraries to meet their information needs.

Inadequate funding/financial support of libraries, provision of relevant IT infrastructures, human resource/capacity building programme in ICT, unstable power supply, and user education in IT are some of the things which pose major challenges to e-library services (Ani, Atseye, and Esin, 2005; Fabunmi, 2009; Ugwuanyi, 2009; Okiy, 2010).

Other challenges are: A largely exploitative local computer market and unsatisfactory after sales maintenance and support; Inadequate pool of relevant technical staff with the problem or difficulty in their recruitment and retention; poor level of awareness of internet facilities in the academic community (Okiy, 2010); low Internet connectivity, penetration and access as well as low perception of the worth and value of e-libraries

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing, the following solutions are hereby proffered as the way forward.

Governments should give priority to funding/financial support of libraries in their budgets and supported by concerned private bodies most especially politicians who have the interest of his nation at heart.

- Sincerity and accountability from beneficiaries of the funds in terms of utilization, prioritized investment in ICT by library managements to support e-library services and provision of effective internet connectivity within the institutions and their environs should be practical.
- Besides, government, private sectors and other stakeholders should unify efforts to transform the nation through e-Library in this era of digital convergence.
- There is the need for educational and other libraries in Nigeria to use appropriate ICTs to access the world information in order to enable, enhance and facilitate the traditional functions of teaching, research and public service effectively and efficiently
- Librarians and information professionals require skills and professional knowledge that can enable them operate and manage and sustain e-library services, thus appropriate training and re-training through seminars/workshops and other professional education courses created for librarians should given them through unified effort of the library management and government.
- There is a need for libraries to seek for more grants and fund from external bodies (locally and internationally) to upgrade or establish the necessary information infrastructures.
- To help address the cost of electronic resources and proprietary software the government of Nigeria should encourage the use of open source software and open access electronic resources (Fabunmi, 2009).
- Academic libraries should be effectively involved in inter-connectivity to facilitate resource sharing. They should work at forming consortium which will eventually progress towards their active involvement in the globalization of their services (Okiy, 2010).
- The problem of epileptic power supply should be properly and drastically addressed by government. Also inverters should be provided to libraries for the purpose of electric power backup so that their e-library

CONCLUSION

The role of academic institutions is critical to the advancement of any nation through manpower development because they provide the high as well as middle level manpower needed. This is done through their programmes of teaching, learning, research and community services. This paper considered how e-library could be used to create safe and healthy environment for effective learning and development of students/learners and other library users. It was stressed that with the potentialities provided by e-libraries the shortcomings of traditional libraries will be well taken care of. However not without challenges, thus solutions were proffered in line with the challenges identified in the paper.

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