ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TOOLS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION LIBRARIES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the integration of Information and Communication Technology tools (lCT) to Colleges of Education in library operations for effective library services. The paper also reviewed the need for effective application of ICT as the best tool for libraries to use in assisting educational researches and students in this age of information explosion. The paper also, among other things, discussed various ICT resources that can be used for effective library operations and services. The paper also highlighted benefits and challenges of ICT to library operations for effective services to all Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Library and information science education in Nigeria has come a long way. Since the establishment of the first library school in 1960 at the University College Ibadan, several changes have been witnessed in the society at large and in the library profession in particular (Igwe, 2005 and Nzotta,2010).

According to Igwe (2005) new trends and development worldwide emerge posing great challenge for library and information science education in Nigeria. Peretomode (2007) observed that libraries in Nigerian Colleges of Education recognized education as the major instrument for effecting national development. The formal education system, in most nations of the world, has been organized in to three levels namely: Primary, secondary and tertiary education. Tertiary education is referred to as higher education, post-secondary education or further education (Peretomode, 2008 quoting FRN, 2004:34).

Basically, Colleges of Education (COE) are established to serve as training grounds for the would-be professional teachers in their chosen subjects or educational areas of interest so that they can be proficient, efficient and adaptable to the changing needs of the society and systems they serve. This position is supported by the goals of the National Policy on Education (FRN,1998:33) for teacher education which among others are:

(a) To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system, and

(b) To encourage and further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers (FRN: 1998:33).

Thus, the provision of library and information systems and services that will stand the test of time so that both the staff and students of the college can cope effectively with the dynamics of the society especially in the 21st century, becomes necessary.

The essence of library and information service provision in Colleges of Education according to the NPE, includes the need to:

(a) enhance teaching and improve the competence of teachers, and

(b) make leaving more meaningful to the students (FRN, 1998:42).

In line with above expectations, all the Sixty Four (64) COEs established in Nigeria by the private, state and federal governments have their respective libraries

to cater for the intellectual, socio-political, cultural and other needs of the staff and students (NCCE, 1996). The libraries are part of the components assessed in the COEs during accreditation exercises by the National Commission for colleges of Education.

Similarly, policy guidelines are provided to ensure the smooth running of the College libraries and their financing (NCCE, 1994).

Libraries and Information Centers in Colleges of Education in Nigeria

Libraries and information centers in **all** educational institutions are essentially expected to enhance the teaching, learning and research by the students and staff alike. That we are already in the 21st century, in which there are more promises of greater heights in scientific and technological advancements and application, libraries and information centers have generally much more challenges to face. Especially, in the provision and access to timely, accurate, relevant, reliable and current information that will satisfy the yearnings of their clientele. Thus, like in other tertiary educational institutions, the main task of the COE librarians, libraries and information centers is to discharge their key functions of facilitating teaching, learning and research. This is done in order to make a difference in the delivery of the needed information and services to their patrons irrespective of time, space and location in this 21st century knowledge-driven and information powered economy and politics through harnessing and proper utilization of the scientific and technological advances especially Informational and Communication Technologies.(I.C.T), it generated a lot of write-up from a number of scholars such as Mohammed(1999), Mosuro (2000), Akande (2001), Madu (2002,2004), Oyinloye (2004), Oni (2004), Obanjemi & Ogunyade

(2004). Undoubtedly, there have been rapid changes in scientific and technological advances across the globe which have consequently compressed the concept of space and time and indeed the entire world into a virtual village. It has also transformed the traditional learning systems and environments into virtual reality right from the 21st century with the aid of super-speed computers, the internet, the World Wide Web, etc. We now have such on-line (virtual) systems and establishments such as the e-mail, e-university, e-library, e-commerce, e-link, e-publishing, e-classroom, etc. (http://search smb,Techtarget.com2006).

These advances will no doubt continue to impact on the production, acquisition, storage, delivery and dissemination of information to the targeted audience of our libraries and information centers as well as on the traditional approach to education, teaching, learning and research. Thus, some of the basic questions which the COE librarians and indeed those in other establishments have to find answers to include:

a) How efficient and effective are the libraries and information centers in the discharge of their major functions and responsibilities?

b) How best can the libraries and information centers disseminate the relevant information to all categories of the target audience at the least time, cost and in the right package?

c) How should college authorities and clientele of the library and information center be motivated and encouraged to effectively use the library and information services to their advantage so that their attitudes and behaviors against the library and information Centre could be changed for good and also improve their teaching, learning, research as well as information enquiry and use skills?

d) How can the libraries and information centers function effectively and efficiently not necessarily just as the main custodian of information resources of all sorts but also from where the library staff are increasingly willing, ready and able to utilize the ICTs to acquire, store, process and disseminate/deliver the needed information for use irrespective of the time, location and format of the information resources and the needy patrons.

While attempting to find answers to the foregoing questions, it should be noted that one of the main goals of education is to transfer the information acquired, irrespective of the channel and source, into knowledge that could consequently change the skills, behaviors and attitudes of the individuals positively for the general advancement of the society. Thus, our libraries and information centers should be seen to be providing the needed services aimed at achieving this goal.

In order for the COE libraries and information centers and indeed those of other similar educational institutions in the 21st century Nigeria, to be relevant and provide the state-of-the-art, library and information services, our librarians should be seen to be more of information managers responsible for information and knowledge management rather than anything else. This call is based on the contemporary challenges of library and information services provision to facilitate interactive learning which is essentially based on ICT technologies such as the computer-based systems, audio-visuals, and telecommunication systems. According to Baker and Tucker (1990),

interactive learning is learner-centered learning using multimedia approach. This is in variance with the traditional approach to teaching and learning which is more or less teacher-centered and mostly based on such linear media as printed

matters and lectures with little or no immediate feedback to and from the learner and teacher. This often results into content dependency, in learning process, non-exposure of the learner to other related views; ideas and skills, and ways of learning and teaching.

What this portrays is that library and information service delivery scene is mere delivery of information which may not necessarily transform the learner to cope with the time.

On the contrary, the interactive learning approach is information-rich and knowledge-based. With the aid of ICTs, both the teacher and the learner are exposed to more than one sources of information. This is where our COE libraries and information centers of the 21st century have a great role to play. They should be seen assisting the students and the staff alike to access various sources of information on their choice and pace to suit their needs, and also to choose which aspect of the information available they found most useful irrespective of the format, time and location.

Library and Information Services in the 21st Century Challenges

The contemporary challenges of the COE libraries and information centers and indeed their librarians in the 21st century Nigeria include:

a) How to cope with the increasing need for data and information acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination/delivery especially using the ICTs?

b) How to provide knowledge-based information that is appropriate, relevant, applicable and comprehensible?

c) How to ensure that responses to information enquiries go beyond

merely what is requested so that the enquirer can have more insight into the issues or tasks in question?

d) How to create an enabling environment that facilitates the retrieval and access to accurate, need-specific and problem-solution information for all categories of clientele?

There is an urgent need for the COE libraries and information centers and those of other educational institutions in Nigeria to find answers to these and similar other questions because:

a) There is a continued upsurge of variety of accessible information resources and services globally due to rapid proliferation of mega scale digitalized libraries and information centers, data base management systems, multimedia information systems and services and internet resources and services useful to both the students and staff. Thus, if the libraries and information centers could not come to the rescue of the patrons on time, they would be faced with the problems of complexity and uncertainty in the choice and utilization of the relevant information as they continue to accumulate over time.

b) The information storage devices are increasingly shifting from the traditional printed matters towards the non-printed medium or what might be called paperless media such as audio, video and computer discs, CD-ROMs and other forms of electronically published devices. Therefore, considering the low level of the students' and staffs' knowledge of ICTs, the need for the presence of the relevant librarian's/information managers to navigate them through the wilderness of these ICT-based

information resources, services and systems needs no emphasis.

c) The librarian has to be capable, willing and ready to function in multidimensional capacities as information manager, information management consultant, custodian of information resources of all formats and information provider without boundary. Hence, the fact that the Nigerian library and information science schools, like their counterparts abroad, are continuously reviewing their curricula and programmers to ensure that their products can cope with the 21st century expectations, as well as the presence of accredited and non-accredited ICT training institutions across the country, the 21st century librarian's/information managers have no excuse for their incapacitation to pilot their clientele in the world of ICT-based information resources and services.

Application of ICT and enhance quality education for sustainable development as the role and position of libraries has dramatically changed. Etim (2004) cited in Okon (2005) observes that the rapid pace of development in the field of ICT and the advent of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession. Libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of ICT necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiates (Okiy, 2005). The present day libraries focusing more on the area of digital, virtual or electronic library that responds positively in all facets of their services and functions if they are to remain relevant in 21st century. As observed by Campbell (2006:17),

numerous creative and useful services

have evolved within colleges of education such as: providing quality learning spaces, creating metadata, offering virtual reference services, teaching information literacy, choosing resources and managing resource licenses, collecting and digitizing archival materials, and maintain digital repositories.

As Lombardi (2000) notes, users will prefer more computer content, more and more computer indices, digitized finding aids, digital repositories of articles, online access to newspapers, etc. Libraries also struggle with when, how, who, and where to begin digitization efforts, while keeping in mind that, hesitation in the digitization of institutional archives will result in relinquishing the fiction to another institutional repository host.

Concluding Remarks

We are not unaware of the numerous problems of libraries and information system, wanting to go ICT. Such problems include:

a) Non-cooperation, lip *service* and sometimes manifestation of deliberate frustrating stand of the relevant authorities against the upliftment of their library *services* not to talk of automation *even* when on paper, there is a policy guiding the establishment, management, training and financing of library and information center. In fact, there are cases of some Chief *Executives* of the Colleges who will not want their staff to attend *even* conferences or would prefer to spend the library *vote* for something else in the College.

b) Non-reliability of electricity and telecommunication systems and *services even* when their *service* charges are on the increase by the day and there have been lots of political statements promising their

rejuvenation for better *services* provision.

c) The low *level* of ICT literacy among both the library and information center clientele and staff. An appreciable number of the clientele and library staff still have phobia for computers.

d) The rising tide of inflationary trends coupled with non-reliability and sometimes non-availability of the needed ICTs and spare parts in the market as well as incompetent and sometimes unreliable technicians and *vendors.*

The struggle must continue using all socio-political, economic and administrative strategies until we get to the promised land. There is no need to remain on the cross roads and continue lamenting *over* our problems. We have to *move* ahead as fast as possible in spite of the prevailing shortcomings hindering the provision of the state of-the-art libraries and information centers.

What we need to do to be relevant in the 21st library and information *services* provision should include:

a) Deliberate effort by the NCCE and the respective governing bodies of the COEs to ensure that all the libraries and information centers are ICT compliant. Also, provision should be made for effective checks and balances on how the library votes are spent in the colleges of education.

b) Realistic approach for the training and retraining of the library and information center staff on the ICT applications to library and information services so as to enhance their ICT literacy levels, information literacy and competence in information work. It should be mandatory for the library staff to

attend conferences/workshops and seminars at least once a year.

c) Visitation of library instruction and orientation programmer to familiarize the clientele with the use of information resources and ICTs for accessing information irrespective of the format and location.

d) Strategic plans for result oriented collaborative activities to facilitate information resources acquisition, storage, sharing and provision of the state of-the-art library and information services not limited by format, location and time of delivery.

e) Short and long term strategic plans for the development and provision of library and information services in the Colleges to be approved and monitored by the relevant organs of the NCCE.

Above all, the advantages of ICT in Colleges of Education libraries include the following service provided as:

- -Online Access to Educational Resources
- -The Digital Reference Services
- -Manpower Development etc.

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