Benefits And Challenges Of Integration Of Information And Communication Technology (ICT) In Academic Libraries In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The development in information and communication technology (ICT) has affected the operations as well as the purpose of academic libraries system with respect to curriculum content, acquisition of materials and administration of libraries. Academic library are taking radical new approaches in their response to changing patterns of usage, free service and qualitative service delivery. There is need to integrate ICT in academic libraries for their survival in this age of technology. This paper dealt on the benefits and challenges of integrating ICT in academic libraries. The benefits examined include: provision of better access to information, provision of independent searching, encouragement of library cooperation, ease of librarians work, wider rooms for resource sharing, ease of library administrative work, reduction in staff costs, improvement of staff morale, effectiveness, efficiency and prestige, access to up to date information. The challenges that could disstrategize this approach include: paucity of fund, inadequate space/accommodation, lack of trained staff, job loss, irregular power supply/power failure, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, ICT encourage piracy. Some of the recommendations made include: improvement in power supply, improvement in library funding to enable in upgrading the facilities, infrastructure, purchasing, repairing and upgrading software and hardware.

Introduction

Since the last two decades, libraries have undergone series of changes, from the traditional manual system of service delivery to the technological system. These changes have given libraries a new shape (Oghenero and Ogheneruemu, 2008). These new changes and opportunities especially in ICT cannot be addressed with out-dated educational tools but by developing a formidable curriculum studies and effectively utilizing the ICT in acquisition, retrieval, searching, and administration of library routine. ICT refers to the technologies that are used to access, gather, manipulate and present or communicate information (Anderson & Glens, 2003) cited by Ubadi (2011). These technologies could include hardware e.g. computers and other devices; software applications, and connectivity, satellite and communication technology Akudolu (2002) cited by Ubadi (2011) defines ICT as all kinds of electronic systems that are used in broadcasting, telecommunications and all forms of computer related communications. This definition of ICT involves the use of computers, online self learning packages, electronic books, digital camera, interactive CDs and satellite and other related types of information and communication technologies applied in library routine.

Recognizing the tremendous role the ICT plays in the education and the development of the youth, the Federal Government in the National Policy of Education (2004: 5) made provision for ICT in school libraries and this necessitated the integration of ICT in the academic library or university library. The integration of ICT into academic library enhances efficiency in the delivery of services to the clientele. Academic library aims at providing the services such as acquisition, storage, processing, and dissemination of information to library users. ICT such as computers are being used in libraries to automate the various library functions formerly being done manually. The library functions include: acquisition and budget control, reference service, serials control, cataloguing, circulation, Management Information System (MIS), and provision of access of online catalogues (Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Libraries generate a lot of data and information from their day to day operation, eg. from interactions with users, interaction with parent organizations, administrative activities and collection development activities (Anyakoha, 2005).

The potential attributes and benefits of ICT to academic library staff and users in the society have been accepted as an imperative paradigm. The introduction of ICT into library operations has clearly changed the way library routine is conducted. Not only is it possible to share resources and form consortium with other libraries and achieve a clear collaboration between different academic libraries, it has paved a way for a new pedagogical approach where there is unparallel ability to spread knowledge and disseminate information. ICT in the library provides students with many educational opportunities, access to information being the most important. It is imperative that libraries and other library staff be equipped with information and technological facilities necessary for efficient and effective library service. This will help to improve the services. Infact, there is hardly

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any aspect of library today which does not use ICT as a partner in progress. This discourse therefore focuses on the benefits and problems of integrating ICT.

Benefits of Integrating ICT in Academic Library

ICTs are providing the following benefits to the academic libraries:

- **Provision of better access to information.** Possibly the greatest effect of ICT on education is the access to unlimited information from different sources, such as internet. It also provides possible access to experienced and expert individuals in various fields. It also paves way for access to archival information. It brings about easy access to information and skill intelligence (Ekundayo, 2009).
- **Provision of Independent Searching.** ICT can salvage the problem of insufficient qualified librarians by providing ICT facilities for the students to use and search information at their own pace, instead of waiting for the librarians to do it for them.
- **Ease of Librarians' Work.** Due to the huge amount of work piled up for the librarians, the infusion of ICT in the academic library has helped to reduce the hectic nature of their job. It also helps to reduce stress and cost arising from the number of staff the library will employ in terms of cost.
- **Ease of Library Administrative Work.** In this computer age, many libraries in Nigeria still carry out many administrative tasks manually. In many libraries, tasks such as registration of students, keeping and retrieving of materials, staff records, keeping inventory of list of vendors/suppliers are done manually. ICT has the potential of easing all the administrative tasks listed above (Mbah, 2010).
- **It attracts encouragement for cooperation and resource sharing.** With the consortium formed by libraries and ICT knowledge, it is now easy for libraries to share the cost of provision and access to library and information resources. Through the ICT, resources are shared among members (libraries). Current and relevant information are available to the academic cum university community.
- **Improvement of Staff Morale, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Prestige.** It will improve staff morale, effectiveness, efficiency and prestige because the staff are able to devote more of their time to more complex tasks, to serve their users better, and to work with modern sophisticated facilities/equipment (Imeremba, 2007).
- **It provides access to up-to-date information.** Library materials and equipment such as computers, books, laboratory equipment and internet facilities couple with software are current and up-to-date materials and equipment which makes access to information easy.

Challenges of Integrating ICT in Academic Library.

Challenges of integrating ICT in academic library are as follows:

- **Paucity of Funds.** Insufficient fund allocated to library poses a problem to the integration of ICT in academic library. Lack of fund brings about inadequate facilities to support full application of ICT technology in the library management.
- **Epileptic power supply.** The epileptic power supply is a national phenomenon that has detrimental effects on all sectors of the economy. This is synonymous with the findings of Yusuf & Onasanya (2004) and Ofodu (2007) who submitted that irregular power supply in the country is a major obstacle to the usage of internet services in all spheres of the economy.
- **Lack of committed, skilled and trained staff.** Kwache (2007), Debasaki (2005) and Oyebanji (2003) submitted that lack of skilled manpower to manage available system and facilities for ICT services hinders its use in libraries. Most libraries lack committed, skilled and trained personnel and technical experts that would support and manage the ICT facilities and equipments.
- **Neglect by Government.** It is obvious that the federal government as well as state government have not recognized the important role of libraries in the provision of data, information, and books that enhance the effective and efficiency of library services. This informs the reason for the poor funding of libraries even in the face of global age.

Conclusion

ICT has made life easy with quick access to knowledge and information as well as communication. The benefits accrued to ICT are numerous if well integrated into academic library. There is now increasing awareness regarding the benefit and potentials of ICT in library management because the library users have now understood the benefits. The challenge therefore is for the government and academic library managements to find ways of tackling those problems.

Recommendations

- The academic library management should buy generators as an alternative source of power supply and the Federal Government of Nigeria should review the power sector in the country so as to ensure uninterrupted power supply.
- The effect of epileptic power supply could be ameliorated by improvement in the funding of libraries.
- Academic library should engage in capacity building through training and retraining of their staff. It can be in form of seminars, workshops, conferences, skill development models, and in-service training. In essence, there should be continuous and periodic training and retraining of librarians and library staff on computer and ICT skill acquisition. This will provide them with practical and functional knowledge of the computers, the required areas where ICT is needed with the hope of integrating it with library routines. A country's educational technology infrastructure sits on top of the national telecommunication and information infrastructure. A functional telecommunication should be provided so as to ameliorate infrastructure-related challenges in ICT-enhanced academic library education workbooks.
- Adequate ICT facilities should be provided to academic library (digital, virtual and traditional library) by both Federal and State Governments and philanthropists.

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