

Full Length Research

Ways of Promoting Electronic Learning through University Libraries in Selected Federal Universities in the North-Central, Nigeria

¹Samuel Dzever Tion, ²Vincent Tarungwa Wua and ³Victoria M. Terwase

¹Francis Sulemanuldachaba Library, University of agriculture, Makurdi. E-mail: Samuel_tion@yahoo.com

²National Library of Nigeria, Benue State Branch, Makurdi. E-mail: agbeevincent@yahoo.com

³Francis Sulemanuldachaba Library, University of agriculture, Makurdi. E-mail: victoriaterwase3@gmail.com

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The paper examined the various ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries in selected federal universities in the North-Central; Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for the collection of data. The population of the study was the ninety two (92) academic practicing librarians in the four universities under study. Frequency tables, percentages and mean scores were used to analyze data. The study revealed that e-mail, use of online information resources, internet search engines/databases, assistance in online retrieval access, use of search engines/databases, multimedia overhead projectors, online subscription of literature, online tutorials etc are some of the ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries. The paper recommended that university administration and the library should lobby government for more funds to purchase and sustain ICTs facilities. Efforts should be made to intensify internal revenue generation to sustain the system; standby generator should be purchased for the library as an alternative source of power supply. Furthermore, university libraries should create their own website which help the library to market their services as well as training librarians to acquire skills in ICTs which is the backbone of e-learning.

Keywords: Promoting, Electronic Learning, University Libraries, Federal Universities, North Central, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries through the ages enhanced access to knowledge through the routine operations that included cataloguing, classification, abstracting, indexing, bibliographic compilation, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI). The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is reshaping these traditional methods. The main

purpose for utilizing technology in the library is to extend human capability through the enhancement of the services mentioned earlier which had been provided manually Longshak (2010). In fact, technology's incursion into the library is creating numerous opportunities for librarians and users of information resources of the library.

Ezeani & Eke (2010) opined that in this present era of information technology, librarians' roles as information organizers and managers have gone beyond the traditional, delving into the realm of the new paradigm which carries along with it, a myriad of challenges. They contend that in this present state, there ought to be new adoptions and integrations whereby librarians adopt new technologies and integrate them into their traditional setting of services and replicate such services using the emerging, modern tools in order to drive access to knowledge. To this end Ugwuanyi & Ezeani (2010) noted that in this 21st century we are being overtaken by the wind of information and communication technology which is coming fast to us. We in this part of the world cannot ignore it, rather have to embrace it, rise to its challenges and join the developed countries in tapping its benefits by transiting from conventional libraries to electronic libraries. Ekoja (2011) concludes that we cannot share in the vast information offered by ICTs nor contribute to it unless we migrate into the electronic environment.

The concept 'electronic library' had been referred to variously as 'digital library', 'virtual library', 'library without borders', or simply community network. Although these concepts have some similarities, there are some differences as well. In this research, the term 'electronic library' will be more preferred as the topic of this research is on e-learning. An electronic library according to Ojedokun (2000) as cited by Ilorah, Nwafor & Onwudinjo (2007) is basically a library that consists of materials and services in electronic format rather than in the print format. The contents of electronic library includes digital materials such as electronic databases, CD-Rom disc and any material used in the library like video and audio-tapes, microphones etc. that require the use of electricity. Etim (2004) summed up that the technological development of the past 25 years, such as the electronic database, online services, CD-Rom, and the introduction of internet has radically transformed access to information. The application of ICTs in the library services to facilitate learning have created diverse ways of quick and portable access, encouraged new research routes, refreshed the information consumer-base and redefined our various methods of information delivery.

E-learning is of great benefit to the organization/Institution, the e-learner or student and the teacher. To the institutions, the incorporation of e-learning is a logical extension of their distance education activities. E-learning is of interest to the residential campus-based educational organizations as well. They see e-learning as a way of improving access to their programs. Great numbers of teachers are increasingly using information and communication technology to support their teaching. To e-learners or students, e-learning is a viable option for those with commitments or conditions such as family, or work, or who cannot participate easily for reasons including disabilities. The

time and cost of commuting to and from campus are eliminated, resulting to less population on campus. E-learning does not know time zones, location and distance are not taken as important. Students can access the online materials anytime, anywhere, while synchronous e-learning allows for real time interaction between students and instructors. In the same vein, students can use the internet to access up-to-date and relevant learning materials as they can communicate with their subject expert in the field they are studying. For the teacher/instructor, tutoring can be done any time and from anywhere. Online materials can be updated and learners are able to see the changes at once. When learners are able to access materials on the internet, it is easier for instructors to direct them to appropriate information based on their needs. E-learning refers to all organized learning activities under the influence of an educational organization that are carried out with the help of information and communication technologies.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have redefined the existing ways of library services in our universities. The literature on library services in an electronic environment affirms that ICT have changed the various ways of providing library services in academic libraries. As the concept of e-learning is been introduced into our university system, the university libraries are also adapting new methods of information delivery to promote e-learning in the university system.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

From time immemorial, universities have remained centers of academic excellence and have evolved through centuries to perform four distinctive functions: to preserve, transmit (teach), and advance knowledge (research), as well as engage in community service. The university is a service institution to develop the human person and advance human civilization. The link between the university and the library is very critical in order to realize the potentials of the university. The unique status of higher education is tailored towards its relations to the library at large. This is because the objective of higher education such as university cannot be achieved without a functional library.

The recent development of Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought about a paradigm shift from the traditional model of classroom teaching to a new concept called electronic learning (e-learning). E-Learning is the use of ICTs to impart knowledge to an individual or group of individuals wherever they may reside on the globe. In other words, it is the use of computers and telecommunication technologies to impart knowledge to learners or students. The most important advantage of e-learning is universal access to education irrespective of one's geographical

location, age, pace and time. Despite several advantages of implementing e-learning in any university system and the role the university libraries are expected to play in supporting the university's mission; Nigerian universities seem not to recognize ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries. This paper is set to investigate the various ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries in selected federal universities in the North-central, Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper is guided by the following objectives:-

1. To find out ways selected federal universities in the North-central, Nigeria have been using in promoting e-learning through university libraries
2. To recommend possible ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social networking is a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them e.g. face book. Ezeani & Eke (2010) pointed out that librarians can harness these tools in interacting with users and knowing what they want. They add that groups can be formed in facebook where strictly academic issues are discussed. A facebook is a hugely popular social networking site that allows you to make connections, share interest and join groups (facebook 101 tutorial 2008) Facebook is becoming more open and social and impacting our experience of the web in ways we had not dreamed. Wikis is an online encyclopedia. It is an open collective publication allowing people to contribute or create a body of information. Ezeani & Eke suggested that librarians are expected to drive users to this platform where they can obtain firsthand knowledge on definitions and concepts. It is a collaborative website where both the writer and the readers can edit and make contributions to topics. Blogs is another utility which allows an individual to make regular postings to the web e.g. A personal diary or an analysis of current events. Blogs can be used to market available library resources which users may find useful. Multimedia is also a good utility for librarians. It allows end-users to access, store, download, and share audio recordings, photographs and videos e.g. Pod casts, flicker, YouTube etc. Ezeani & Eke (2010) summed up that, all these platforms boil down to knowledge access. In employing these tools, librarians drive access to knowledge by establishing contact with the users and providing their needs.

Multimedia services in university libraries are another

method of promoting e-learning in any higher education system. Reitz (2004) defined multimedia as a combination of two or more digital media (text, graphics, audio, animation, video, etc) used in a computer application, such as an online encyclopedia, computer game, or web site. Multimedia applications are often interactive. Also, contributing to the definition of multimedia, Naidu (2006) said that this refers to computer-based software that suitably integrates audio-video, text, and animation into a single product. Multimedia is therefore a combination of two or more digital media which uses a computer application and is often interactive. It is important to note that in most contemporary technology enhanced learning environments where media is skillfully integrated with the instructional method, media can and do play a very influential and critical role in learning and teaching. According to Tamas & Vauthier (1996) quoted by Madu & Pam (2011) despite the high cost of the systems and their use, multimedia education builds on the basic principles and should be incorporated in library services. Multimedia resources in libraries have the capability of presenting to the user information in more than one channel which enhances more utilization and understanding of the information being used. This conforms to the Chinese saying that:

What I hear, I forget
what I see, I remember
what I do, I know

Online reference service is another method of promoting e-learning in university system. Madu (2008) opined that reference service is undoubtedly one of the basic services provided in the library and is the root of librarianship. Katz (1982) defined reference service as the process of answering questions. He further pointed out that an individual user has a query about a topic and approaches the reference desk expecting the librarian to provide an answer or indicate where or how an answer may be found. Reference service is the personal assistance eagerly given to library users in pursuit of information by a librarian in charge of the reference section (Madu 2008). Reference service is therefore the apex of librarianship whereby the librarian seeks to satisfy the hunger of the user with information. It is the formalized provision of information in diverse forms by a reference librarian who is interposed between the inquirer and the available information source.

With the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in reference service, Kohdrup quoted by Anozie and Usman (2010) maintained that the use of internet in reference work gives the librarian new possibilities and support searching of information by users. ICT is changing the environment in which reference service is being offered today in our libraries.

The internet provides the reference librarian with the opportunity to provide on-line reference service. According to Madu (2008) an electronic resource contains a variety of information types and has grouped them into bibliographic data-bases and non-bibliographic databases. He defined bibliographic databases as those in machine readable format and includes indexes and abstracts, while non-bibliographic databases are those electronic databases that are not in machine readable format and include full-text databases.

It is no doubt that ICT has revolutionized access to information in libraries and users now search databases with the use of on-line catalogues terminals. The result is that reference service is more efficient and effective as questions posed to the reference librarian are answered faster and more easily using computerized sources. According to Bopp in Madu (2008) library users familiar only with traditional library services are amazed and impressed when the reference librarian without leaving his desk, moves fluidly and confidently from one online database to another to find an elusive citation or to print out the full text of a periodical or newspaper article.

It is not an overstatement to say that ICT has impacted and improved the content and quality of reference service rendered in modern libraries. Access to outside databases of other libraries had considerably improved through the delivery of documents by e-mail as well as answers to reference queries.

Furthermore, a study was conducted by Ilorah, Nwafor and Onwudinjo (2007) on "the place of university libraries and e-learning in universities in Anambra state. A case study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa; Anambra state university, Uli; and Madonna University, Okija." The major objective of the study was to identify the preparedness of university libraries in Anambra State to support e-education programme recently introduced in our university system. Specifically, the study sought to find out the essential ICTs for e-learning, the ICT facilities available in the university libraries in Anambra State, the benefits of electronic library, hindrances to the establishment and efficient use of e-library in the university libraries in Anambra state and the way forward. Survey research design was used to carry out the study. Questionnaire and observation checklist were instruments used for data collection and twenty (20) professional librarians from the three universities formed the population of the study. Data collected was analyzed using percentages. The findings of the study showed that the essential ICTs for e-learning at the university libraries are lacking. The study also showed some factors that impede the establishment of e-learning to include, poor funding of university libraries, the library resources have not been digitalized, they are still in print format. The study recommends the establishment of e-library foremost before e-education in Nigeria universities.

Eteng & Ntui (2009) also conducted another research

on "Access to e-learning in Nigerian university system (NUS): a case study of University of Calabar". The study sought to survey the extent to which e-learning is applied in University of Calabar for effective teaching and learning processes. The design of the study was survey research and University of Calabar located in the Niger Delta area was used as sample. Questionnaire, physical counting and observations were used to gather information from respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to one hundred (100) lecturers and three hundred and fifty (350) students spanning across arts and science based programmes during an e-learning workshop organized by AfriHUB. Mean scores were used for the analyses of data.

The findings revealed that lecturers and students are literate in the use of most aspects of Information and communication Technology (ICT), most e-learning facilities are available and functional but inadequate in the University of Calabar. The situation in the University of Calabar may be applicable to many Universities.

Another study was undertaken by Dadzie (2009) on "E-learning and E-library services at the University of Ghana: Prospects and Challenges." The purpose of the study was to investigate the prospects and challenges of using an e-learning platform, Knowledge Environment for Web-based Learning (KEWL) by the teaching staff of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ghana. It also highlights the need for integrating e-library services within the e-learning platform. Data collected through survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews and opinions, expectations and capabilities in using KEWL for teaching and learning. The population of the study was the teaching staff of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ghana. The study found that infrastructure, technology and training should be considered by university administrators to increase the rate of adoption of e-learning within the university community. The study recommends a modest contribution to the discourse on the integration of e-library services within the e-learning platform from a developing country's perspective. It offers important insights into how e-library services and e-learning in developing countries can be better managed to enhance its rapid adoption.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey. The population size of the study was the ninety two (92) practicing librarians in the four selected university libraries in the North-Central, Nigeria. The sample size was all the academic librarians practicing in the four institutions. Questionnaire was the only instrument used to collect data. Frequency tables, percentages and mean scores were used to analyze data collected for the study.

Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Retrieval

Institution	Number distributed	Number Returned	Percentage returned	Number Lost	Percentage Lost
FUTM	32	26	81.25%	6	18.75%
UAM	18	14	77.77%	4	22.22%
UNILORIN	20	15	75%	5	25%
UNIJOS	22	16	72.72%	6	18.75%
TOTAL	92	71	77.17%	21	22.82%

Table 2: Ways of Promoting E-learning through University Libraries
N=69

S/N	E-LEARNING	VHE	HE	LE	NA	\bar{X}	DECISION
1	Electronic mail	25	14	20	10	2.78	Accepted
2	Use of online information resources	22	18	17	12	2.72	Accepted
3	Internet search engines/databases	17	22	21	8	2.70	Accepted
4	Assistance in online retrieval/access	12	20	27	5	2.60	Accepted
5	Use of search engines/databases	14	18	27	10	2.52	Accepted
6	Multimedia/overhead projectors	17	22	21	8	2.18	Not accepted
7	Online subscription of literature	21	18	17	14	2.16	Not accepted
8	Spreadsheets	15	10	15	29	2.15	Not accepted
9	Online tutorials	8	9	25	27	1.97	Not accepted

KEY: VHE=Very High Extent, HE= High Extent, LE=Low Extent, NA= Not at All

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires administered to the four institutions selected in the zone. Ninety two copies (92) of questionnaires were administered to the practicing librarians in the four institutions. Seventy one (71) copies of the questionnaire, representing 77.17% were completed and returned to the researcher.

The result obtained from table 2 above revealed that electronic mail (e-mail) is the major way of involving university libraries in the promotion of e-learning in universities with the highest mean of 2.78. This is closely followed by the use of online information resources with a mean of 2.72. Other ways include internet search engines/databases, assistance in online retrieval/access, multimedia/overhead projector and online tutorials with a mean of 2.70, 2.60, 2.52, 2.18, 2.16, 2.15, and 1.97, respectively.

DISCUSSION

The result in table 2 ways of promoting e-learning through university libraries, the findings in table 2 reveal that e-mail is the most used facility in the university libraries under study. E-mail is used for document delivery, one to one communication, one to many

communications etc. The findings also indicated that respondents use online information resources to render library services to their users. Assistance to users to access or retrieve information is undertaken and use of internet search engines is employed to browse the internet. However, online subscription of literature, multimedia resources, online tutorials and spreadsheets are not common among the federal universities. According to Longshak (2010) the main purpose of utilizing technology in the library is to extend human capability through the enhancement of the services which had been provided manually. By implication no modern library can ignore the use of technology in the provision of library services.

The attainment of quality service delivery in libraries requires improving on selection, acquisition, organizing, preservation and dissemination of information through the use of ICT. The internet which is an offshoot of ICT has provided several opportunities for the librarian to disseminate and collaborate with individuals without geographic limitations and space. The imperative of the internet in book selection, acquisition, cataloguing and classification, circulation, serials, reference etc. cannot be over-emphasized. With internet connectivity, university libraries can provide several services mentioned above to support and promote e-learning in universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The university administration in conjunction with the library administration should lobby government seriously for more budgetary allocation in order to purchase and sustain ICT facilities
2. Efforts should be made to intensify internal revenue generation in order to have enough funds to sustain the system
3. A standby generator should be purchased for the library as an alternative source of power supply
4. University libraries should create their own website which will help the library administration to market their services
5. Librarians should be trained and re-trained to acquire skills in ICT which is the backbone of e-learning. They should also show more commitment to their duties.

CONCLUSION

The symbiotic relationship between libraries and education is so obvious that it is not debatable. The link between the university and the library is very critical in order to realize the objectives of the university. No education programme such as the university can succeed without functional libraries. As the emergence of ICTs and related technologies has brought a dramatic shift from the traditional method of education to a new method called e-learning. the university library is capable of providing student access to up-to-date information anywhere, anytime and to promote independent learning. In order words, if university libraries are involved in the implementation of e-learning in the education system, they are capable of providing high-quality learning resources and exchange of information on a global scale through the networked technologies such as the internet and the World wide Web (www).This will enable the universities to carry out their mandate of teaching, learning and research.

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