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October 2010

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Ejedafiru, Efe Francis, "Lack of ICT Infrastructure as a Barrier to Resource Sharing in Nigerian Libraries" (2010). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 431.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/431>

Lack of ICT Infrastructure as a Barrier to Resource Sharing in Nigerian Libraries

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Introduction

Information communication technology (ICT) refers to technology that transmits, stores, creates, displays, shares, or exchanges information by electronic means. Libraries and librarians must adopt ICT to be a successful part of the information environment (Ungern-Stran and Lindquist, 1995). ICT has brought radical change to libraries in Nigeria, but this change is not seen uniformly across the academic libraries in the country. Academic libraries need to forge partnerships in establishing online information sharing networks. Enabled by technology, resource sharing is the only hope for the future.

Battin (1980) notes that, "if we are to acknowledge openly our ... acceptance of the responsibility for the health of national scholarship, we must channel our energies in the design and development of effective cooperation activities at the national level." Libraries engage in resource sharing because no single library can meet all the needs of its community. That is why Song (2000) asserts that:

No library can effectively satisfy its users from the resources within its walls. We are living in a time where a library's worth is increasingly being measured by the services it offers in terms of helping clients to access universal information rather than its respective collection.

Efforts at efficient resource sharing in Nigeria seem to have come to naught. This is tied to the inadequacy of existing resources, lack of information about them, inadequate security of materials, uncooperative attitude of parent bodies, lack of policies, inflation, and unstable budgetary allocation (Vervliet, 1979; Banjo, 1984; Edoka, 2000; Nwazuoke, 2001 and Ejedafiru, 2003). These problems are worsened in the traditional mode of resource sharing where ICT is not applied. The changing face of information services and the slow pace of adaptation in Nigeria creates a problem for future collaboration. Librarians require both theoretical and practical knowledge of information technology (Nwalo, 2000). Libraries must build up the necessary infrastructure to promote resource sharing.

Currently, library assessment focuses more on outcomes or "the ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources and programmes (Ackerman, 2007). There is evidence that academic librarians use technology to obtain information not available within their own libraries. The issue is, will resource sharing activities made possible by ICT make academic libraries obsolete or enhance their role in networked environment? In the apt words of Tinio (2002):

ICTs greatly facilitate the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, offering developing countries unprecedented opportunity to enhance educational systems, improved policy formulation and execution and widen the range of opportunities for business and the poor. One of the greatest hardships endured by the poor, and by many others who live in the poorest countries is their sense of isolation. The new communication technologies promise to reduce that sense of isolation and to open access to knowledge in ways unimaginable not long ago.

Nigerian libraries need access to a larger range of information resources through sharing networks. As resource sharing moves into the spotlight, scholarly materials are provided from remote sites as efficiently as they could be from local libraries. Research likewise suggests that when considering building library collections and more physical infrastructure, the cost savings from sharing resources and the social price of not providing access, ICT is attractive and necessary. The role of libraries has been challenged by Google, Yahoo, subject portals, digital libraries, and open access repositories (Haravu, 2007). These services use new methods to acquire, analyse, display, and organize information and are undoubtedly a threat to the traditional role of libraries and librarians.

Rationale for ICT in Resource Sharing

Hogan and Dahlbach (1997) surveyed Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Institutions to measure the degree of electronic resource sharing. The findings showed that the most frequently cited motivations to share were “enrichment of resources available to all participants” (97 percent) and cost (37 percent). Ungern-Sternberg and Lindquist (1995) elaborate on advantages of electronic documents:

1. Some documents are more useful in an electronic form due to enhanced searchability and manipulability.
2. Electronic form is sometimes the only alternative, so it represents a net increase in the information base.
3. The volume of printed materials is continuously increasing at great and the library can only afford to acquire administering part of it. The great volume also makes it advantageous to use electronic tools to locate the material.
4. Economic in Storage: the increase in cost for keeping printed materials makes electronic forms more attractive from an economic viewpoint.

The introduction of ICT in resource sharing, has brought about a great transformation from the traditional approach to a modern approach. Academic libraries entrusted with the heavy task of providing readers with the latest or current and retrospective materials apart from improving their inter-library loan service, should take a number of wide-scale measures to improve and reinforce international cooperation in the area of exchange of publications and international lending services. For instance, the online catalogues of collaborating libraries can be combined to create a “union catalogue” of holdings for multiple libraries, and added components can be configured to interface with the other libraries to enhance resource sharing.

Tanvir (2005) corroborate this:

Exploration of new means of resource sharing can help overcome the financial constraints faced by most of our libraries and information centres. In this age of information technology, we can go for new concepts and ideas which will ultimately open new vistas of knowledge ... Digitization of libraries would ultimately reduce our dependency on ... physical presence during particular ... hours.

Methodology

This research is based on information gathered by the researcher through direct observation of facilities and interviews with the reference librarians in four academic libraries. The criterion used for the selection of the libraries was proximity.

Results

Table 1: Libraries studied

S/No.	Name of University Library	Acronym
1.	Delta State University Library, Abraka	DELSU
2.	Niger Delta University Library, Bayelsa State	NDU
3.	John Harris Library, University of Beni, Benin City	UNIBEN
4.	University of Port Harcourt Library, Rivers State	UNIPORT

Delta State University Library

The DELSU library has acquired about 23 computers, indicating that it is making an effort to use ICT for resource sharing. The reference librarian confirms that the library has consulted computer experts to complete the installation, and will soon be fully computerized. The library cannot be said to be involved in resource sharing arrangements now, because the ICT facilities are not in place to carry out such duties.

Niger Delta University Library

The NDU library has eight computers connected to the Internet. In the course of the interview, the reference librarian noted that the library is doing everything possible to install communication systems like the telephone and the telex. This will make effective communication between libraries easier. The librarian also noted that up to this point, the library has not been automated, though there are urgent plans do so in the near future.

John Harris Library, University of Benin

The UNIBEN Library has twenty Pentium III personal computers and other accessories. Most routine activities of the library have been computerized. The university authority has appointed an Information and Communication Technology Committee, which coordinates the processes of computerization. The librarian also threw some light on the application of ICT in the area of resource sharing. The situation for now is encouraging, considering the problems involved in networking. They send students to other university libraries with a letter of identification, asking other libraries to assist them. The librarian emphasized the need to conduct a training and education of library staff in new modes of operation.

University of Port Harcourt Library

The commonest form of resource sharing they are involved in is interlibrary loan. In most cases, they make photocopies of needed materials to users. They realize the need for automation, but there are no tangible plans for it. The UNIPORT library has just three computers, which are not connected to the Internet.

Conclusion

None of the libraries under study are fully using ICT for resources sharing. Much remains to be done by Nigerian libraries to enhance resource sharing services. The four reference Librarians unanimously agreed that the reasons for the failure of resource sharing in their libraries were poor communication infrastructure, negative attitude to automation, not being technically ready, lack of cooperative spirit, inadequate photocopy services, slow document delivery system, inadequate funds, lack of policy, and lack of union catalogue. The university librarians unanimously admitted that if libraries are networked with ICTs, they will eliminate space problems, supplement library stock, meet users' demands better, and discourage piracy. In the present economic meltdown facing the country, universities are not well funded. If the government wants these institutions to survive and be of good

quality, more funds should be allocated. Resource sharing in academic libraries in Nigeria is doomed unless Nigeria as a country realizes the importance of ICT for solving social problems and helping the social and economic development.

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