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Globalization and ICT in Academic Libraries in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Introduction

In the last couple of years, students and lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions have increasingly demanded and preferred access to electronic sources delivery and networked information from their respective libraries (Covi and Cragin, 2004). Internet access is one of the greatest technological advancements being experienced in this 21st century. It revolves around advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which has gone a long way to influence the mode of information gathering, storage, retrieval and dissemination in these times. Internet access is used for electronic mailing services, electronic on-line chats, group activities among others (Akintunde, 2006). It has resulted in increased access to timely, accurate, relevant and current information in most ICT compliant libraries all over the world.

Academic institutions play major roles in the manpower development of any nation since they provide the high as well as middle level manpower needed for the social, economic and political advancement of a nation. This is done through their programmes of teaching, learning, research and community services. The central place of academic libraries is called into play because it is the duty of these libraries to provide the necessary information to the lecturers and students to achieve their teaching learning and research needs in the easiest, fastest and most comprehensive way. This central place of the library in academics has resulted over the years in the necessity for academic libraries to continue to evolve and move with the times so that they can deliver on the requirements of academic libraries in meeting the academic needs of their clientele in the tertiary institutions. This need has resulted over the years in the libraries in higher institutions in Nigeria displaying different stages of development in the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), to library services. The current trend in may library worldwide is the deployment of ICT facilities in rendering services of various kinds to their patrons thereby providing speedy and up-date information for their use. Furthermore, the globalization of the entire world in recent times has placed additional demands on academic libraries to conform in order to avoid the risk of obsolescence and irrelevance in the scheme of things. Teaching and research in tertiary institutions now demand the use of high caliber ICT

infrastructure and facilities to keep abreast of current information in all fields. According to Omekwu, (2006), information growth has been exponential and the concept of information explosion is no longer new to information professionals. However, there are current developments in the professional horizon that impact on professional practice and the emerging roles of librarians in a global environment.

Be that as it may, Akintunde, (2006) opines that "many libraries in Nigeria still operate in the traditional service pattern where librarians are in charge in main service points of circulation, reference, serials, acquisition, cataloguing and documents without any emphasis on academic disciplines" This is a sad affirmation of a similar complaint several years ago by Afullo (2000), that Nigeria was rated among the lowest in Africa in telecommunication infrastructure and so not much is expected of academic libraries in Nigeria. In the light of the foregoing, this papers will examine what globalization is, the benefits of globalization to library services, the problems inhibiting the deployment of ICT infrastructure and facilities in Academic libraries in Nigeria and the way forward.

What Is Globalization?

In the opinion of Guillen, (2000), globalization is a process leading to greater interdependence and mutual awareness among economic, political and social units of the world. It is the "accelerated compression of the contemporary world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a singular entity" Wikipedia defines globalization in "literal sense as simply a means of international integration, that is a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and functioning together" This process is a combination of economic technological, socio-cultural and political forces, hence Akanni (008) asserts that globalization is a broad term with several dimensions such as economic globalization, globalization of education globalization sporting event, globalization of Library services, among others. The special library Association cited by Akanni, (2008), listed the features of globalization as follows:

- A world in which people interact with their colleagues around the globe, exchange information and messages and coordinate activities through variety of technological and communication means;
- World problems have become interconnected;
- Every single aspect of making's activities, concerns and consist is encouraged

    in global sense;

- An emerging globally integrated society that is demanding increased use of technology and information obtained through technology;
- Information has become the most important ingredient indecision making anywhere in the world;
- The exchange of information worldwide has become imperative;
- An increasingly interdependent society where information services has increased the need for networking across national boundaries;
- Information professionals will be able to communicate, not only as a global community but also create global information marketplace with opportunities to participate in changes, not only of information but of employment opportunities worldwide.

It is obvious from the foregoing that ICT is a major factor in the actualization of globalization. With the use of ICT, it has become possible to access a variety of information and knowledge sources in a manner that would be simple, easy and independent of time, place and subject discipline.

According to the University of Winconsin, Madison (2008) cited in Omekwu and Echezona (2008), ICT revolution is seen as the central and driving force for globalization which has widened the imagination and the abilities of library and information professionals to produce, access, adapt and apply information in their organization and institutions. Globalization scenario emerges not only in terms of evolution of cyberspace but also in the traffic of information across geographical boundaries and at all times (Omekwu, 2006). Shrinking of time and space, the volume and speed of access to worldwide information in a network environment are the clear evidence of the globalization of information.

Benefits of Globalization

Viewed in the light of the hallmarks of globalization which is clearly the shrinking of the world into a seamless entity, the benefits of globalization to the information profession and hence academic libraries are enormous. There are transformations of traditional libraries to virtual migration of information to electronic format. These are all responses to pressures being faced by educational research and learning organizations to acquire, process, manage, disseminate and communicate knowledge in electronic format using the new information technologies. Physical barriers have broken down, libraries and the services they provide now have borderless territories due to the application of ICT in libraries thus resulting in the benefits articulated several years ago by Alasa and Kelechukwu (1998) as follows:

- Quick and convenient information exchanges;
- Access to experienced and expert individual in thousand fields;
- Access to regular updates on topics of interests;
- Enhancement of team work across geographical distance;
- Access to archives information worldwide;
- Transfer of data between machines and provides a great platform to have fun and be entertained.
- As a reference tool, the internet provides wealth of up-to-date resources unavailable in bond volumes;
- The internet gives personal access to specialization and experts in hundreds of disciplines;
- It enables you to reach your fellow librarians with messages and documents independent of the constraints of mails, telegraph or even fax;
- One can collect news and facts which can be stored in one's computer for later use in reference;
- Resources in the internet allow libraries to provide better services to their patrons by giving on-line access to information that will be difficult to locate in any other manner;
- The internet provides access to bibliographic records of millions of books and the details of the holdings of academic and research libraries around the world. Electronic journals and newsletters are made available on a regular basis;
- Librarians can make the selection of books required in their institutions and order them without going from one bookshop or publisher to another;
- The Computer Read Only Memory (CDROM) is another versatile facility made available in academic libraries through the presence of information technology.

Omekwu and Echezona (2008), corroborated these benefits as follows:

- Libraries are now situated in cyberspace;
- Library services are no longer constrained to time of opening and closing hours;
- Library users can access services in libraries beyond their own, beyond their country and continent and
- The virtuality of information resources means that millions of users can

access one resource at the same time.

Still on the benefits of globalization, of library services, Akanni (2008), also identified the following as benefits of globalization to library services:

- Improved access to information;
- Enhancement educational development;
- Improvement in the status of Nigerian libraries;
- Digitization of local content;
- Conservation of library space.

Akintunde (2006), opines that ICT and (hence globalization) are irreversible global trends that have great benefits for academic purposes and so all efforts must be made to embrace them by Nigerian academic libraries. Embracing them will automatically make students and academics in Nigeria, members of the global information community. Apart from tapping from the global information supply, academic libraries in Nigeria can also contribute local content to the pool of global information through the digitization of local content from sources such as theses and dissertations, rare books, newspapers and special manuscripts (e.g Arabic), among others. Hezekiah Oluwasanni Library of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife and the University of Jos Library are currently involved in an African-wide project to digitize theses and dissertations emanating from their institutions through the Association of African Universities Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD) project since the last five years. (Jagboro, 2007).

Impediments to ICT and Globalization

(1) Dearth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Infrastructure and facilities in academic libraries in Nigeria

One of the major problems militating against globalization of information services in academic libraries in Nigeria is the dearth of ICT infrastructure and facilities. This problem has been lamented severally by authors such as Chizenga (2000), Oketunji (2001), Okiy (2003), Gbaje (2007), and Akanni (2008). To date, many of the problems militating against adequate provision of ICT facilities and services in academic libraries in Nigeria as enumerated by Alasa and Kelechukwu (1998) are still very much with us. These problems include:

- Poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities;
- Poor level of ICT literacy even within the academic community;
- Poor computer facilities;
- Poor level of awareness of internet facilities in the academic community;
- Minimum involvement of academic institutions in network building and diffusion in Africa;
- Ignorance of decision or policy makers of the power of information network on the economic and industrial development of a nation.

Still on the dearth of ICT facilities, Oketunji (2000), identified problems such as:

- 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.

(2) Funding

In addition to the foregoing, Zakari (1997), Ochai (2000), Oketunji (2000), and Okiy (2003) identified inadequate funding as a major obstacle to the

acquisition and application of information technology facilities in academic libraries in Nigeria. Chesenga (2000), noted that "many libraries in sub-saharan Africa especially academic, school and public libraries depend entirely on government funding for their operations. Funding from government is no longer adequate." It is sad to note that even recently, Akintunde, (2006), Blakes, (2006), Jagboro, (2007) and Omekwu and Echezona, (2008), had reasons to cite inadequate funding as a major setback to digitization and hence globalization efforts of academic libraries in Nigeria. For instance, the funding problems experienced by the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi library of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in their efforts towards digitization of their theses, dissertations and newspapers led to sourcing for funding from the Carnegie Corporation of the United States of America and the Association of African Universities. This was because funding from the Nigerian government was grossly inadequate. As Akintunde, (2006) puts it, "Funding by government (Federal and State) which has been the sponsor of 75 percent of the libraries has been dwindling and quite unreliable in the last few years."

(3) Epileptic supply of electricity

The general low supply of electricity in most parts of Nigeria has also been identified as another major setback to globalization efforts in academic libraries in Nigeria. Zakari (2009), opines that academic libraries in Nigeria are plagued by epileptic power supply among others in their efforts to connect their libraries to the internet. The serious nature of the epileptic power supply in academic libraries was also captured by Jagboro, (2007) as follows:

"Another major challenge is power supply. Computerization and digitization became unrealizable in an environment of epileptic power supply. For instance the H.O. library (OAU – Ile-Ife) suffers from acute power supply disruption from the national grid. Institutions, companies and individuals are forced to procure alternative power supply which has prohibitive initial financial outlay and running cost. Thus, the issue of power supply has to be given a priority by any library aspiring to attain global visibility."

It is pertinent to note that till date, the Nigerian government has been unable to provide even the much promised 6,000 megawatts of electricity generation in Nigeria. Currently, power supply still fluctuates between 3,600 and 3,700 megawatts of electricity generation (Anuforo & Olayinka, 2010). With this poor level of electricity supply in Nigeria, the populace is under pressure to provide electricity for most of their activities through the use of electric generators. Generally, this is rather inadequate and very expensive.

(4) Lukewarm Attitude of the Nigerian Government

The lukewarm attitude of the Nigerian government to the provision of ICT infrastructure and facilities at the level comparable to international standards has been generally lamented by Okiy, (1998) and Adedoyin, (2001). Some important steps required to be taken by government in this regard are not only the formulation but also the visible implementation of an ICT policy for the nation. For in the opinion of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, (2001), ICT policies and strategies are essential tools to define Africa's response to the challenges of globalization and to nurture the emergence of an African information society. This is especially important, given the rapidly growing international focus on ICTs and development. Be that as it may, "policy implementation remains one of the key issues in many developing countries in Africa particularly given the fact that while many countries have a national ICT policy in place very little progress has been achieved in most cases in policy implementation. Sarker De (2005), identifies the problems associated with the adequate implementation of ICT policies particularly in developing countries (including African countries) as follows:

- The government identified ICT as tool for development but most of the

policies result in sectoral development of ICT in software rather than focusing on social induced developments;

- Most countries do not have definite national development masterplan;
- There is a lack of availability as well as unbalanced distribution of information and communication infrastructure in most of the countries;
- Various studies have revealed that people's awareness and knowledge of the benefits of ICT is very low and needs to be enhanced;
- Inability of the countries to keep pace with the continuous and rapid speed of ICT innovation and development.

Nigeria along with Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi and few other Africa countries have formulated National Policy for Information Technology (Adomi and Igun, 2009). However, because most policy markers in Nigeria do not yet perceive information as an important resource, vital for national development, they have not been quite forthcoming in ensuring its implementation. It is no wonder therefore that some of the key supportive public services for telecommunication and electricity supply such as Nigerian Telecommunication (NITEL) and Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) are not empowered to render such services. The government of Nigeria like in other countries, is the body with the kind of huge funds required to provide and maintain the necessary ICT infrastructure and facilities for the information institutions in Nigeria. The finding by Omekwu and Echezona, (2008) that "the present ICT usage of 5.8 percent by Nigeria among West African countries which was made possible by government's recent liberalization policy in which over 50 internet service providers were licensed to market their services starting from 1998 though inadequate is a right step in the right direction.

Although many academic libraries are taking up the challenge of the current trend in globalization of library resources and services to source for funds to digitize their library resources for easier website access as is the case with the H.O. library of OAU, Ile-ife and the University of Jos library, these are just few out of more than one hundred universities in Nigeria and several other higher institutions as well. In the light of these efforts, Gbaje, (2007), revealed that only 19 universities have website/webpages, while only 10 of them have websites/webpages dedicated to their libraries. In a recent study, Akintunde, (2006), also revealed that only very few academic libraries such as universities of Benin, Lagos, Ahmadu Bello, Bayero, Ibadan, UNN and Port-Harcourt, and of course Ife and Jos, have put facilities in place to drive some good progress in their application of ICT at various levels of their library services.

Recently, many academic libraries have resorted to the use of funds from the Education Trust Fund (A government Agency) to provide ICT facilities and electronic libraries in their universities. This source of funds has been criticized by many librarians as inadequate and unreliable. This is because the funds are not easily forthcoming and difficult to access. This problem was captured in a publication by the Education Trust Fund, (2009), with the heading "Accumulated Unaccessed Funds," to the effect that "The Education Trust Fund (ETF) has accumulated unaccessed funds of N22.6 billion for various beneficiaries including tertiary institutions across the country from allocations made from years 2000 to 2008." Since the ETF is a government agency, government could step in to ensure that funds from this agency is easily accessible to the institutions concerned to cushion the funding problems in libraries to a large extent.

(5) Lack of ICT Competencies by many Librarians

According to Gbaje, (2007), "the implications of transporting library services to the online environment for the Nigerian academic libraries in the digital age are enormous particularly with the dynamic nature of digital technology which is constantly creating the need for new skills, work environment and work methods. Tennant, (2003), also opines that to be effective, librarians and information professionals must constantly learn and

retool and be very versed in web technology. Omekwu, (2003), articulated the e-competencies required of librarians as follows:

- Have basic knowledge of computers and their capabilities;
- Competency with search engines;
- Competency with internet facilities;
- Competency with e-mail;
- Competency with internet navigator tools;
- Competency with web browsers and web file formats;
- Competency with database softwares;
- Internet development and management know-how.

It cannot be over emphasized that academic librarians need to brace up to the new challenges of ICT competencies so that they can render more effective services to their library patrons in this electronic environment. The age-long apathy of older librarians towards ICT should be jettisoned. Okorie and Ekere (2008) assets that if information professionals do not keep abreast of the changing technologies, they will be unable to manage the different types of information resources and cope with the ever growing information needs of the users in this electronic age. Librarians must be involved in training and retraining. They must retool in order for them to be able to manage successful electronic library services.

The Way Forward

In the light of the foregoing, the following are hereby recommended as the way forward;

- Government at both the federal and state levels in Nigeria must develop a more pro-active and progressive attitude to the implementation of the national policy for Information Infrastructure and Facilities;
- There should be massive injection of funds from both the Nigerian government and some international donor agencies such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York as is the case in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, for the effective globalization of library services in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- Practicing Librarians must be involved in training and retraining in the knowledge of ICT competencies required for them to effectively manage the resources in the academic libraries towards globalization of their services;
- Library schools in Nigeria should incorporate ICT competency training into their curriculum. The library schools would be required to have viable ICT laboratories to ensure appropriate hands-on ICT training for the students. The lecturers would require to be effectively ICT literate to be able to impact the appropriate ICT know-how to the students of librarianship;
- The problem of epileptic power supply and poor telecommunications infrastructure should be doggedly addressed by the Nigerian government by injecting the necessary funds and technical expertise;
- Academic libraries in Nigeria will need to 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. The efforts of the National Universities Commission of Nigeria in this direction should be intensified;
- There should be collaboration between experts in ICT know-how in the computer centres in the higher institutions and their academic libraries to fast-track the active participation of academic libraries in Nigeria in the globalization of their services. The collaborative efforts of the libraries and some ICT experts from the ICT centres in University of Nigeria,

Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo Univeristy, University of Lagos, University of Port-Harcourt and the University of Ibadan should be maximized and emulated by other academic libraries in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the discussions in this paper on the state of ICT infrastructural facilities in Nigeria in relations to the requirements for globalization of academic library resources and services in this electronic age, several benefits derivable from globalization of library services as well as the problems inhibiting easy implementation of globalization of academic library services have been highlighted. It is obvious that academic libraries and librarians in Nigeria will be required to do a lot more for them to adequately bring the benefit of globalization of library services to their clientele. Government lukewarm attitude at both the federal and state levels to the funding and provision of ICT infrastructure and facilities in Nigerian libraries should change and be more supportive. The training and re-tooling of librarians in the necessary ICT skills is a necessity for the benefits of globalization of library services to be impacted on academic libraries and their users in Nigeria.

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