HARNESSING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FOR 21ST CENTURY LIBRARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

A basic understanding of ICT in library school is vital in keeping abreast of rapidly changing information society. This review examined the status of ICT in library schools, integration efforts of ICT in library schools, benefits of ICT, challenges of ICT integration. The paper recommended among others the need to review the curricular of library schools to incorporate ICT: and also the urgent need for policy development by the government which will create an enabling environment for all stockholders in building critical mass of ICT proficiency and competencies. There is the need for strategic and specialized ICT skills among academic staff of library schools in order to enhance their optimum productivity.

Keywords: ICT, Library schools, Nigerian: 21st century.

Introduction

More urgently than ever in its long history, the world of library education especially library programme has the need to engage in a process of change adaptation and modernization. Over the past few decades development in ICT have brought changes to library education and infrastructures in Nigeria. A cursory look at the emerging issues in library education in Africa indicate that the rise of new stakeholders, internal factors, globalization and the rapid pace at which new knowledge is created and utilized provide major challenges to library education across the world and Nigeria in particular. It is also pertinent to observe that library and information programmes have global curricula guidelines that have been developed by the global academic community in collaboration with the umbrella of professional associations and accreditation boards. Thus, there is a universal understanding of what needs to be taught in library and information science degree programs.

One way to ensure compliance with global standards is to ensure that ICT is not only used as device for carry library operations, but also part of the curriculum of library schools in Nigeria. Global changes have put pressure on all groups or programs to

constantly acquire an ICT. From its conception, the authorities of library school saw the need to produce librarians who were properly equipped intellectually, professionally and otherwise to offer effective library services in Nigeria. One of the most commonly cited reasons for ICTs in the library school has been to better prepare the current generation of librarians for a workplace which ICTs particularly computers, the internet and related technologies, are the contents. Technological literacy, or the ability to use ICTs effectively and efficiently by trained librarians, is thus seen as representing a competitive edge in an increasingly globalizing job market.

EnGuage of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (US) has identified what it calls "21st century skills" which includes digital age literacy (consisting of functional literacy, visual literacy, scientific literacy, technological literacy, information literacy, cultural literacy, and global awareness), inventive thinking, higher-order thinking and sound reasoning, effective communication, and high productivity. The clarion call is for all library schools to imbibe in their graduates the opportunity to attain all the above skills so that trained librarians can compete favourably and survive in this 21st century knowledge based society.

The Concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002) defined ICT as the range of technologies that are applied in the process of collecting, storing, editing retrieving and transfer of information in various forms. Therefore, ICT represents as a diverse set of technology tools and resources used to communicate, to create, store, manage and disseminate information. These technologies include computers, internet broadcasting, technologies (radio and television) and telephone. Aluede (2011) postulated that ICT is a marriage of convenience between computer and communication technology. ICTs are a potentially powerful tools for extending educational opportunities, both formal and non-formal, to previously underserved constituencies −scattered and rural populations, groups traditionally excluded from education due to cultural or social reasons such as ethnic minorities, girls and women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, as well as all others for reasons of cost or because of time constrains are unable to enrol on campus (Tinio, 2002).

ICT is one of the pillars of emerging global knowledge economy. This means that ICT readiness of library schools will determine their competitiveness in library profession and services. ICT is best described in the class room pedagogy where information is

communicated from teacher to student with a sole purpose of achieving educational learning. Beside, ICT aids learning in the following ways:

a. It helps breakdown the barriers between teachers and students.
b. It makes the unknown to the student known.
c. It improves socio-cultural behavioural patterns of students.
d. It improves ethnic awareness of students to the norms and existing moralities of the immediate community.
e. It serves as an agent of change and
f. It helps disseminate ideas, educational materials and instructional resources (Obunadike, 2011).

Library school therefore need to understand the global trends driven by the knowledge economy because that will affect their ICT competence and also serve as a benchmark for their ICT driven graduates. Librarians anxiety over being replaced by technology or losing their authority in the library profession as the learning process becomes more learner centred, an acknowledged barrier to ICT adoption can be alleviated only if library educators have a keen understanding and appreciation of their changing role. Conclusively, advances in ICT obviously facilitate advancement and improvement in library education. It is therefore useful for library schools in Nigeria to keep the concept of ICT in mind as they begin to strategize ways to use ICT as tools for "leap- frogging" stages of library profession.

The status of ICT in Nigeria library schools

There is an upsurge in the number of library schools in Nigeria in the last decade, coupled with the recent advancement in the information and communication technologies. Beside, ICT has become more important and widely used among different professions. In recent years there has been a consensus of interest on how computers and the internet can best be harnessed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of library education at all levels. But ICTs are more than just these technologies, older technologies such as the telephone, radio and television; although now given less attention, have a longer and richer history than what as instructional tools. Tinio (2002) postulated that ICTs greatly facilitate the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, offering developing countries unprecedented opportunities to enhance educational system, improve policy formation and execution, and opportunities for business.

Inspite of all these merits, print remains the cheapest, most accessible and therefore dominant delivery mechanism in Nigeria Library schools. The use of ICTs to deliver lecture is still in its infancy in Nigerian schools, and this can be traced to limited infrastructure, inadequate qualified personnel, poor ICT polices, obsolete curriculum design and attendant high cost of access. However the reality of this new technology means that its introduction and integration in library education will be a great challenge. Failure to meet the challenge would amount to further widening of the knowledge gap and the deepening of existing economic and social inequalities between Nigeria and other developed countries.

It is expected that this 21st century library schools reconsider, re-shape and redesign their curriculum by incorporating new tools and technologies, upgrading information resources and training of academic staff and information rofessional that are well equipped to take the profession to the great height. In a nutshell, global changes put pressure on librarians and information scientists to constantly acquire and apply new skills. The International Labour Organisation defines the requirements for education and training in the new global economy simply as "Basic Education for All", "Core work skills for all" and "Lifelong learning for all". And the library profession should not be an exception in this situation.

There are considerable differences of e-readiness between library schools within Nigeria. Many schools have embedded ICT into their curriculum, and have demonstrated low levels of effective and appropriate ICT use to support teaching and learning across a wide range of the library courses. Hence Ozioko and Nwabueze (2010) opined that library systems in Nigeria are largely dominated by conservative and unproductive practice. For the Nigeria library schools to face the challenges of the 21st century, the information studies programme in the various Nigeria library schools should undertake reform/innovation, which should emphasize information and communication technology both in theory and practice (Udoh, 2000). A cursory look at these challenges suggest that educational policies, programmes and methods of delivery of these libraries schools must undergo transformation in order to meet the requirements of the electronic age.

Integrating ICT into Library Schools in Nigeria

The escalating demand for education at all levels in Nigeria and the compelling need to provide education for all irrespective of environmental, social or cultural circumstances have meant that the country must of necessity find the appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge unmet demand for

education (Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoyoe, 2008). The cost effective means of providing library education to all would be library and information scientist is through ICT. Hence, government efforts at integrating ICT in our library schools need to be visited. In the word of Okojie (2011):

> *"as a quality assurance agency responsible for the development of university education in Nigeria, the NUC recognises the need to ensure that our educational institutions are at par with standards worldwide, to ensure the production of graduates and research developments that will be globally competitive. It is in this regard that NUC have been emphasising that technology should play a leading role in moulding our activities and those of the universities".*

In addition to this, the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in 2005 have provided resources in providing ICT to tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Banks and Multinational companies have also contributed their quota to the implementation of ICT in tertiary institutions. For example MTN Nigeria, has computerized some tertiary libraries in Nigeria by constructing ICT compliance library. Aguele (2007) stated that there is a memorandum of understanding with a private firm to provide staff of tertiary institutions with personal computers under the computerize Nigeria Project (CNP).

A look at all these, suggest that the library schools are not left out of this development. It is in the realization of these significant roles played by information in the development of a nation that library schools were set up. They are expected to train and produce the needed manpower for the nation's information industry. Udoh (2000) lent credence to this when he observed that there is a great demand for the services of information works (librarians, archivists, documentalists , corporate information analyst) in the Nigerian labour market. However, the onus of accomplishing this task lies with our library school ability to incorporate ICT into their curriculum; because "the illiterate of the 21st century" according to futurist Alvin Toffler (2007)" will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn'.

Benefits of ICT to Library Schools

Information and communication technology is seen as the electricity of the information age and its access to library and information science education as a key to the process of development (Ozioko and Nwabueze, 2010).The pace of change brought by   new technologies have had a significant effect on the way people learn, live, work and play worldwide. This challenge the traditional process of teaching and the way and manner library education is delivered. Here resources for teachers and students are   expanding as the demand for technology in these classroom increases. There is a growing   evidence that ICT can enhance the quality of library education providing teachers and students with information and presenting standards that have never been available before.

There is a general consensus that ICTs especially computer and internet enable new ways of teaching and learning rather than simply allow teachers and student to do what they have done before in a better way. Tinio (2002) collaborated this by observing that these new ways of teaching and learning are underpinned   by constructivist theories of learning and constitute a shift from a teacher- centred pedagogy-in its worst form characterized by memorization and rote learning-to one that is learner-centred. Besides, the students have also learned that the information highway is so vast and that the web can offer a wider body of knowledge that the teacher and the textbook cannot provide.

A cursory literature search revealed the following benefits of ICT to Library schools: enhances access to information, raising of the quality of library education; enhances and amplifies existing library school curricular, promote student information and problem solving capability, recoding and analyzing student achievement, and shifted teachers role in classroom from being the sole giver of information to being a facilitator of learning and manager of instructional resources. With all these benefits it is therefore necessary to advice that library schools in Nigeria must not risk becoming obsolete due to lack of information and communication technology abilities and emphasizes that every library school curriculum must incorporate technology in the classroom and in practice to meet the technology needs of today.

Challenges of Integrating ICT to library schools

Ogunsola (2004) opined that majority of higher institution in Nigeria, even those with good internet connectivity are still at a low level of the integration of ICT in

teaching, learning, research, library and information science and managerial services. Hence, the capacity of library schools to lead the process of integrating ICT into education is woefully inadequate. In specific terms affordable and sufficient bandwidth, and the human capacity to exploit the technology. According to Federal Ministry of Education (2009), Nigeria is experiencing a severe shortage of ICT skills and personnel necessary for taking advantage of new and emerging technologies in the knowledge society. This is compounded by a poor and expensive bandwidth provision, as well as poor and obsolete ICT infrastructure and services in Educational system.

If these are the position of higher institutions in general then the position of library schools in particular are potential candidate for heart attack. The state of unpreparedness of library schools can be traced to over concentration on the traditional courses in the discipline. These traditional courses were approved by the universities and the accrediting bodies. Coupled with the bottleneck in designing new courses by most of the library schools.

Another challenge has to do with the issue of qualified academic staff. For the fact that most of these schools are new and may be dominated with young lecturers who have no doctorate degree and little experience of teaching at the university level. Worst still the few qualified lecturers (probably doctoral degree holders) may not be very knowledgeable in the application and adoption of information and communication technology in library education There is cadre variation in the attitude of academic staff towards ICT. Aguele (2007) in his study of ICT in universities in Nigeria revealed that junior academic staff (Lecturer 1 and below) are more favourably disposed to the use of the computer than senior colleagues. The author reported that in his study of senior academic staff only 16% of the participants indicated that they would like to use ICT tools in teaching and learning, while 84% of them were uninterested in the integration of ICT into teaching and learning. The new breed information worker needs to be well trained and informed about tools for practicing his or her profession. The onus therefore, lies on our library schools in general and our academic staff in particular to produce world class librarians which can only be possible through a world class library education driven by ICT. The collective resolve of library schools should depend on the extent to which our human capacity is developed and transformed to compete globally.

The way forward
The future prospects are bright, the use of ICT is beginning to get a wider approach in library schools in Nigeria. Today, the use of ICT to teach and plan coursework,

undertake projects and homework, and carryout experiments and research or in the use of internet for on-line registration and advisory services is now a common occurrence in our educational system, especially at the tertiary level of education (Aluede, 2011). There is the urgent need for all the curricular of library schools to be revised to incorporate ICT. It is expected that this task of change will not be an easy one as many staff and decision makers are sometimes reluctant to embrace change in curricula and pedagogical approaches.

In fact, Nigeria needed a goal-oriented policy as well as well-thought-out plans and strategies to harness the potential of ICTS for national development. A way forward is mandatory training programmes on ICT competencies and proficiencies, and to based promotion of academic staff not only on publications but in addition to certification in mandatory training in ICT in classroom teaching/learning processes in Library schools.
From the school programs studied by the researchers, it was observed that most library schools are yet to introduce ICT related courses in their programs. In the few library schools that they are available, it was observed that most of the lecturers are not ICT compliance, hence their inability to effectively teach ICT related course.

The following recommendations therefore will help to enforce complete compliance to the introduction of ICT related courses in library schools. The librarians registration council with its mandate to regulate library education standard should as a matter of urgency enforce the introduction of ICT related courses in library schools throughout the federation.   ...

National University Commission on its part should direct universities that offer library education to train and retrain their lecturers in the library school so as to be able to effectively impact the ICT knowledge to the students.
ICT knowledge should be one of the qualification required before one is employed as lecturer in library schools.

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