LIBRARY COMPUTERIZATION: NIGERIAN REALITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a recent ontological view of the concept of library computerization at a global perspective. The paper not only saliently x-rayed the processes involved with library computerization but also provided insight to the advantageous effect the novel trend has in eradicating illiteracy and promoting educational development through efficient library use especially among the developing countries of the world. Novel capabilities of library computerization such as increasing the moral/prestige of librarians, job creation/division of labor etc., vis-à-vis hindrances to actual library computerization were treated by the paper. However, that it is a global time bomb is factual as the paper portrayed the fact that it has universally breached the gap of educational development as obtained in the world between the most developed technological states and others.

Keywords: Library Computerization; Globalized Information; Illiteracy; Educational Development; Developing Countries. Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept library computerization process originated quite some decades ago in the more technologically advanced countries of the world such as the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain (AKINTUNDE, 2002). It is observed thus that the trend has gradually transcended to other states of the world especially the impetus is more in the growing third world countries such as in the African, Asian and the Caribbean countries.

Library computerization is the process of adequately utilizing computer hardware cum software's and its varying facilities such as networking cables, software packages, scanners aid pointes in accomplishing library functions which were originally performed manually by the librarians. Obaseki (2007) stated that "[…] computers have transcended, the status of mere computing to communication as the

uses of computers worldwide are primarily for communication data in networked environments".

Computerizing the library functions and services encompasses the initial:

- planning processes;
- Selection of hardware and software;
- Acquisition of selected hardware and software;
- Training of library personnel on the use;
- Maintenance of these novel system;
- Networking of computer terminals (inter linking of computers);
- Retrospective conversion of the library collections i.e. printed materials and artifacts records by means of computer software into machine readable options.

These steps above seem easily accomplishable, but in recent times the increase in the rate of a publications which is attributed itself to the universal growth of human knowledge vis-à-vis the justifiable growth in social, economic, industrial and educational development has precipitated the problem of information management especially in Africa and Asia continents, which is a function of all libraries all over the world. This problem i.e. adequate information provision and management has proved inimical to the growth of education standards in developing countries (ABDUKADIR, 1991).

Interestingly it is observed that the gap in educational advancement between the more advanced states and the under developed states in terms of technological infrastructure looks set to be overridden. This is so as successive innovations have been made in educational sub-sectors such as in libraries in developing states such as Nigeria, Ghana etc. (DANIEL, 2002). These have led to the increase in the use of libraries by students and staffs in recent years in academic institutions in the areas of computer application to information management in libraries, teaching of ICTs use and application in library schools attached to educational institutions, increase in educational funding just to mention a few.

Iromatu (1996) stated that "Libraries today have shifted from conventional libraries where books and other printed texts are consulted and borrowed. In line with this Kasperek (2003) opined "That computer technologies are becoming part of

many library jobs especially at this era 21st century when the role of this technology in information services expand at first rate".

Furthermore, the presence of Internet in libraries accessible only with the aid of information technology and communication. Many libraries have developed sites to organize and publicize internal and external links to information. It is of note that computerization has enabled libraries all over the world to develop complex and simple globally accessible pages listing hours, locations and resources available while others have developed web layouts using a wide variety of languages.

That library computerization is a welcome change is not an over stated fact. This is so as Kline (2003) asserts that "Academic library patrons face an information landscape that is radically different from the sheltered havens that we experienced as patrons, by contrast our patrons will work in electronic environments were the boundaries between scholarly information, popular resources and outright misinformation are blurred. This have been observed to be truism as the unprecedented increase in government efforts in providing to its citizenry profitable concrete and definable educational standards is more vivid in recent years especially in African states of Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa just to mention a few. As government and its agencies has lost patience with the old ways of information resources acquisition, management and provision.

2 HOW AND WHEN

In Nigeria, the federal government as far back as 1983 took a loan to facilitate the provision of information/computer technologies such as CD-ROMs, and training of library personnel on its uses, for 20 universities (ABDULKADIR, 1991).

This stance has however over the years been improved upon as the government of Nigeria through its various agencies such as the Nigerian University Commission (NUC), the Educational Trust Funds (ETF) and the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) to mention a few while recognizing the aberrance i.e. importance of ICTs to educational developments in Nigeria vis-à-vis development of the information base of the citizens has contributed to library and improvement.

According Kumar and Kar (1995) opined that, NUC the body regulating the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, sponsored, developed and purchased computer library software such as XLib, TINLIB for Nigerian university library use. In line with the above United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1998) reported that the ETF/PTF, since inception in 1990s till date, have continually distributed free computer hardware and software to tertiary institution libraries in Nigeria. The ETF have also built standard befitting library buildings at all the spheres of Nigeria educational system.

In addition to these, there are increases in the budgetary allocations to education vis-à-vis educational institutions and their libraries. This is so as between 1999 till date various states governments and the federal government have demonstrated their love for current and well managed ICTs information based libraries.

This is revealed with the erection of an eye catching super structures as libraries, e.g. The Edo State government sponsored and erected a public library one of the first of its kind in the southern axis of Nigeria in the last democratic regime 1999-2007 with all the characteristics of what makes it a modern computerized library as well as the erection of a modern academic library at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

Also the federal government also releasing huge financial allocation for the complication of the second phase of the Bayero University Kano Library which on its completion today stands out as a cynosure of all eyes. Though it is pertinent that the presence of ICTs e.g. computers and internet facilities, in libraries makes a library better equipped in this information age and not the physical building. This is true as ICTs has proved to be an instrument to the fastidious death of illiteracy in the developing and advanced states in the world were illiteracy is more prone especially areas such as Australia and Bulgaria; Ice Land and Fine Land, in the Antarctica; Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Congo and Zimbabwe, in Africa; Brazil, Peru and Colombia, in South America, just to mention a few.

Thus the computerization of library encourages the transfer of knowledge over physical geographical boundaries with less time and efforts in as much as enriching the information capabilities of citizens in international states.

3 BENEFITS OF LIBRARY COMPUTERIZATION

The computer application and use the libraries all over in Nigeria have proved to be magnanimous contribution to the over-all educational enhancement of all humans irrespective of social, economic, religious cum racial affiliations. This is a truism as library computerization has led to the:

a) Increase in the patronage and use of information resources at various information centers especially the library, vis-à-vis the growth in personnel information quotient of persons in the world. This is so as the provision and application of computers and its other peripherals in the library have transformed the library into digital studios were information easily could be manipulated and acquired. In addition this novel trend of library computerization attracts patrons to the library for various purposes, some for sightseeing, recreation, research etc. It is observed that the rate of library patronage especially in universities universally has increased drastically, as in case with Nigeria, were people hardly use the library in early 1990s. The situation has changed as librarians and library management now employ means to curtail the overpopulation of their libraries especially in university (academic) libraries e.g. Bayero University library were clienteles want to use, touch or have the feeling of being around a computerized digital library.

b) Increase in moral and prestige of library staffs/personnel's. In most Africa states per se the concept of who a librarian is, to the lay man outside, was subjectively dehumanizing to the library personnel: Hence they were viewed only as Book-keepers/Book sellers of little importance to the society. This reason however was owned to the decline in our level of education cum the inability of the past African states government especially the colonial authorities to shed light on the importance of libraries to educational advancement of all society as obtainable in Europe and the Americas. Recent development in the universe has precipitated the novel concept of information age, which entails that all

human has to live, eat and sleep with information. It was observed that to easily get this information in the era the library has to be technologically improved, hence the gradual change from manual to computerized ways of performing all libraries functions and services. Thus the presence of these equipments in libraries attracted persons to the librarians who the patrons now see as technologist or experts in manipulating these equipments and at same time above the library staffs. On it own the egoistic attributes on the librarian have swelled as they now view themselves as information scientists/managers rather than book keepers.

c) Faster and easier ways of getting library functions, services and activities done. Book selection and acquisition; bibliographic searching and reference services; interlibrary loans and cooperation are some of the tasks of libraries that were before now done manually i.e. with human efforts and much time. These recent trends of library computerizations have made these task a mere children game. This is so as the eventual "[…] application of computer to library has made the library work easier and faster to accomplish" (KUMAR, 1995). Also library computerization when properly applied has the tendency of breeching internationally acclaimed physical boundaries. This is truism as with the use of the international network system libraries computerized can participate in resource sharing activities amongst themselves; this will lessen the amount of funds spent in acquiring physical information resources.

d) Creation of job opportunities within the library. This is necessitated by the presence of computers and its accessories. Observed that the library has transcended to the height of an organization, in less than a decade, from the focal point of just building where books are kept. At present there are novel men job categories in libraries, especially the academic libraries such as web developers, computer instructors, maintenance officers, ICTs managers/officers, just to mention a few.

e) Computerization of libraries has provided libraries with cheaper means of purchasing information resources for their libraries. This is so as other methods were the libraries have to apply the use of manual means in

selecting and acquiring its resources is more costly and involves more human efforts. Thus libraries now acquire information resources through the World Wide Web and Internet, this have made it more affordable for libraries to procure more current information resources such as journals, which are very costly when procured in physical format.

Though these noticeable novel trends that are resultant effects of library computerization have gone a long way in shaping and stabilizing the educational aims and objectives of all international state especially in African states such as Nigeria. There exist still some impediments towards proper library computerization.

They include:

1. Financial impecuniosities

Often it has been noted that library management and librarians are willing and ready to make changes from the traditional method of library to novel trends, there is the negating factor of scarcity of funds. This factor over time has been viewed as a resultant posture of library management lukewarm approach to library development. Hence management exhibits their tight fist nature towards funds release for the procurement of novel library technologies and tools.

2. Dearth of Qualified Competent Librarians

Libraries especially in developing countries are be quitted with arrays of personnel's who are not librarians by qualification. Hence these persons who function as library personnel's do not have the capacity of functioning properly in a library environment thus leading to the under development of the library in function and services rendered.

3. Lackadaisical attitude of librarians towards rendering of service

The future of libraries lies in the ability of librarians to collaborate with faculty. To do so, the librarian needs to be considered as an equal with faculty members. Today's librarian should develop awareness of the culture of her library and the culture in which the library exists, they should live and participate in the intellectual discourse so vital to the university community and the librarian should be constantly involved in scholarly research. In doing this, will eradicate the notion of many persons towards who a librarian is.

Other impediments include:

- Inadequate library legislation;
- Submissive attitudes of library heads;
- Autocratic/dictatorial stance of library parent management.

Furthermore, Amekuedee (1995) stated that barriers to successful library computerization in Ghana include:

- Lack of co operation among university libraries;
- Attitudinal problems among librarians; and
- Personnel problems.

Once these above hindrances are tacked librarians and libraries, all over the globe will definitely take a deep breath of satisfaction as result of the habitable atmosphere created by library computerization.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The excursion so far has been on the effect of library computerization around the globe. Though it is cost effective, the final output is considered a desirable end. Interestingly the modus-operandi of all libraries is for the emancipation of mankind from the clutches of the evil mechanism of illiteracy and misinformation as it is observed that man globally naturally are information sick unless properly educated (schooled) in the art of information extraction and use.

This aim is considered unachievable by any library in this present age of information explosion if it relies on the manual means of rendering services. Though this paper adequately stated that only proper library computerization will elevate librarians and patrons fully to the level of information consciousness. It is imperative that there need to be a balance between technological knowledge and traditional library practice. Thus, with the universal improvement of information literacy, providing for greater balance between all countries.

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