Resource Sharing and the Need for virtual Libraries in Nigeria University

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Abstract: *This paper sets out to discuss resource sharing and the place of virtual libraries among university libraries in Nigeria it is obvious that university libraries in Nigeria have been beaten hands down in meeting the needs of user. These are an underutilization and considerable disparity between and within the academic libraries in their levels of application and use of information and communication technology. Majority of the university libraries stills use the traditional methods of service provision and resource sharing, suggesting the most library authorities have not done much to embrace and integrate this information technology in their routine operations operation. Universities are compiled to shift gears in other to justify their existence in the changing information environment, and there is need for studies that address various issues that relate to technology adoption and use. The advent and pervasive role of the virtual library in academic libraries and its potential impact on learning, teaching and research, show that all efforts should be directed towards this laudable project.*

Keywords: resource sharing, virtual libraries, Nigeria, university

INTRODUCTION

Wijasuriya (1980)   viewed "resource" in relation to libraries to be documentary resource of published and unpublished materials in a library whether in book or non-book from. It could also be extended to cover human resources of staff, the equipment and facilities of an organization or the service provided. Experience has shown that all these elements whether human or material are capable of being shared either at the national, regional resource sharing as a primary service strategy which affects how we define

collections, how we provide readers service and how we mediate (or decline to medicate) the delivery of information to the end user.

Resource sharing between libraries has a long history and it is a device evolved by libraries to broaden the base of information available. Whatever resource may be involved, a basic objective of all academic libraries resource sharing programmed must be to improve the ability of the participating libraries to perform their basic function of matching user needs and information resource. The only approach that permits resource sharing to work is that which entails having resource to share, having a willingness to share them, and having a plan for accomplishing resource sharing. If all these condition are meant by the participating academic libraries, then their resources will become a common pool with unlimited extension of other boundaries.

 It is on note that the Obasanjo Administration which took off in May 29, 1999, out in place on impressive reform process in education level while the second is on the higher education sub-sector. Together, these two effort are converging to assume improved quality of the educational delivery process at all levels. Within This setting, the virtual library project is one of the severalstrategies that have been devised by the then Honorable Minister of Education Professor Babalola Borishade to booster teaching and learning in Nigeria schoolthe quality of United Nations (viD@nigerianvirtuallibrary.net.). by the President during the 31 Educational Scientific and cultural organization This was however, revisited General Conference of the 2001, the organization agreed to refocus for Nigeria towards(UNESC0) in October 2001, tits special plan Action programmed establishing a virtual library for higher education institutions. The idea was that given the low capacity of the higher institution to stock their libraries with relevant books and literature, it was imperative to exploit information and communication technologies (ICTs) to provide solution to this problem (UNESCO 2003). In line with this development academic libraries in Nigeria are gradually waking up to the need to forge partnership in establishing on-line information sharing networks. The need to exploit information and communication technologies (ICTs) to share locally and internationally available information resources have become critical. Libraries all over the world are continually being forced to re-evaluate their role in the wake ofan increase in value and demand for information coupled by the emergence of a sophisticated class of clients. Academic Libraries are therefore compelled to shift gears in order to justify their existence in the changing information environment.

Enabled by technology. The practice of sharing puts Virtually every library in the state at everyone's fingertips and SO provides for an equalization of sources regardless of Community wealth and resources (Joanne, 1999). There 1s a general consensus, that resource sharing offers academics Hurt (1995) describe efforts libraries a dramatic opportunity to leap frog into the future breaking out of decades of stagnation and decline. However, efforts by academic libraries in virginia to increase resource sharing through developments. Highlights include co-operative collection development, software designed, workstations, and an interface to connect online catalogues, Patron initiated inter-library loans, and budget information.

The story is different in Nigeria where the ICT infrastructure is poorly developed and where ICT skills are still inadequate, building the virtual library will not be easy.

Ogunsola (2004) recommended that for the survival and relevance of university libraries in Nigeria. ICT should be declared as institutional priority with adequate funding and support. However, ICT infrastructure initiative covers four key areas;

1. Acquisition of technology by institutions, including institutionalized computerization efforts.

2. Development of telecommunication infrastructure

3. The establishment and acknowledgement of standard setting institutions.

4. Government promotion and financing of specialized technology industries (Palombo, 2005).

 In spite of the challenges of financing the initial investment in creating information infrastructure, there is a lot to be gained in the long run. Khalid (2000) summarized the

benefits as follows:

Cooperation and networking in library information systems

provide a wider access to collection, improve public and

technical services and enhance, operations by sharing

resources, reducing duplication and offering more cost

effective services.

Segal (1989) opined that networks "have the health effects of bringing even the smallest libraries into contact with large databases of bibliographical holdings and information from several types of libraries". There is no doubt that these cooperative efforts break down institutional barriers for both the Users and staff of libraries. The need to share and transfer information among academic c libraries in Nigeria is paramount. Etim (2006) observed d that "Nigeria has been involved in many

projects to create National Research and Education Networks NUMIS, MUNet, VLC, all in an effort to develop and Use ICT to foster collaboration among and between NULP, VLC, all in an effort institutional administrative and academic communities".

    Experience has shown that the advent and pervasive dominance of the in the 1990s served further to accelerate this new and welcome emphasis on giving the wants of library users, since students and prominence to the academics generally were beginning to adopt very different forms of information -

seeking behavior. While some at least saw the development of global electronic access to information as a threat to the very future of the physical library, others rightly saw it as an opportunity to rethink, and to refashion. Their library's services according to what their users needed in what had become for the first time, fast changing information environment.

For the future, academic libraries in Nigeria should take an active part in the new information age and offer new services in order to fulfill their role as information providers. Ogunsola (2004) noted that the proliferation of Nigerian universities,

despite the economic recession in the country since the 980s, has aggravated the problem for universities and their libraries SO much that their future seems uncertain. Pertinent to observed Is that academic libraries are dogged by very lean budgetary allocations, epileptic power supply, inadequate communication personnel, lack of government systems, shortage of IT skilled person support in formulating relevant policies on the establishment of national information infrastructure and absence e of formal agreement among academic libraries.

The reality of the Digital-Divide-the gap between those who have access to and control of technology and those who those who do not - means that the introduction and integration of ICTS at different levels and in various types of education will be will be a most challenging undertaking. Failure of academic libraries in Nigeria to meet the challenge would mean a further widening at of the knowledge gap and the deepening of existing economic and social inequalities. This is so because countries y with advanced technology are years ahead of countries with developing economy. In the future, the distinction between developed and non-developed countries will be joined by distinctions between fast countries and slow countries, networked nations isolated ones.

Virtual library provides value-added solutions for all academic and facilitates on-line access to an enormous current volume of academic information. Schiller (1992) defined virtual libraries as "libraries in which computer and telecommunication technologies make access to a wide range of information resources possible". Nau (2003) asserted that the virtual library has an opportunity to address the scarcity of teaching and research materials in the libraries of institutions of higher education in Nigeria. Russell (2005) observed that while digital technologies and an ever-expanding communication network infrastructure have enhanced creation and wide distinction to the public, these same technologies can be used to control or restrict public access to information.

Institutions that make use of modern information and communication technologies in their teaching and training can be said to engage in "virtual teaching activities" and can be classified as "virtual institutions". The development of virtual (digital) libraries have however, made it possible to have to other collections. Collection development is thus changing

From a static mode, acquiring library resources, to a dynamic to information. ln the apt words of node, providing access to information Unger-Sternberg and Lindquist (1995):

The change from ownership to access is gradual

 and the extended task of the library to an

information provider will increasingly shift

the emphasis from local collection to

 information that is not owned by the

library, but which will be available through

 co-operation between different systems.

There is a general consensus, that an effective virtual library among academic libraries would allow the institutions and indigenous researchers to share their research outputs with the global community as well as ensure the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages. The researchers agreed with Ogunsola and Okusaga (2006) who opined that the virtual library can be regarded as a child of necessity arising from the need to use technologies in accessing the world information overload, or information explosion for human survival and development. It is therefore necessary for academic libraries to embrace it. Okebukola, in Russell and Dlamini (2002), argued that a virtual library would improve the quality of teaching and research through the provision of current e-books, journals, and other library resources. One of the most commonly cited Reasons for recommending the virtual library has been to better prepare the current generation of library patrons for a workplace where 1CTs, particularly computers, the internet and related technologies, are becoming more and more ubiquitous. Technological literacy effectively and efficiently, is thus seen as representing a competitive edge in an increasingly globalizing job market.

However, there are some signs that Nigerian university libraries have awakened to the demand of technology. Presently, the use of personal computers and CD-ROMs for

developing local databases and for literature searching is common. Libraries now use e-mail for international linkage the use of network now features in their operations and some academic libraries are embarking on retrospective conversion of their card catalogue to machine-readable form while a number of them are now hooked to the internet. It is also on record that serious efforts are being made by African universities to foster cooperation among libraries through the Association of African Universities (AAU), with the support of the International Development Centre (IDRC). At the national level, there were many candidates vying for the honors of hosting the coordination secretariat

of the virtual library, among which were the National Library, the National University

Commission (NUC) and the National Technology Development Agency (NITDA).

In spite of all these, the NUC was shouldered with the task of building a National virtual library project that enhance access to locally available resources and international

library collections for sharing with university libraries all over Nigeria, using the digital technology. The uniqueness of the virtual Library is that it is space less. In other words, since what it requires is the conversion of target library collections into electronic formats and placed on the internet, to be accessed by anybody anywhere, there is no need for a centralizing bureaucracy for the project. Each participating institution should contribute its own unique content, and even charge others for this. In this way, duplication of efforts would be reduced while allowing for each to contribute with its capacity and specialty (UNISCO, 2003).

Even though paper has not disappeared nor will disappear, advances in the fields of telecommunication, computer communications have technology and satellites

revolutionized information delivery services in advanced countries (Ogunsola and Okusaga, 2006). Academic libraries Nigeria must change to survive. Even though the cost of an in virtual library project appears overwhelming in the short-run. the long-term costs of maintaining traditional library services and collections are beyond the ability of individual libraries to support. There is no doubt, that electronic materials have changed the manner in which librarians work in many ways. The concept of "access" instead of ownership is now the order of the day.

A virtual library provides access to tools such as databases, electronic references, and quality-vetted e-resources. It is often referred to as "digital library" or "electronic library".

community network, or simply ''library without wall". However, there exist some basic differences as noted by Tennant (1999) who opined that an electronic library consists of

electronic materials and services as video tapes and CD-ROMs while a digital library consists of digital services and materials that are stored. processed and transferred via digital (binary) devices and networks. Furthermore, the virtual library on the other hand consists of both digital and electronic Libraries existing virtually.

The virtual library will enable Nigeria and other developing countries' scholars and students to profit more fully from electronic communications revolution by having access to database critical for their research and teaching (Ogunsola and Okusaga, 2006). The rapid acceleration of computer and telecommunication technologies can reasonably be expected to appreciably raise our educational standards in the 21" Century, and quite possibly in some of the remaining years of the century.

Problems of Virtual Library and the Way Forward

Palombo (2005) observed that information communication technology infrastructures and education programmers tend to be more constitutional zed in regions considered economically developed in comparison to poorer, less developed regions". The network society is creating parallel communications systems: one for those with income, education, and literally connections, giving plentiful information at low cost and high speed: the other for the without connections blocked by high barriers of time, cost. And uncertainty is dependent upon outdated information (United Nations 2000 Annual Development Report) However, Palombo went further to identify four pre-existing conditions to be met before technology infrastructure can be developed:

i. There must be a developed transportation and communication system in place.

ii. There must be an institutionalized system of specialized education and high literacy standards.

iii. A national legal structure must be in place to protect economic rights.

iv. Most importantly, there must be a source of financial capital.

At this juncture, one can ask how much of these pre-existing conditions are obtainable in Nigeria. In the light of the above Nkann (2006) noted that university libraries have tried to get the latest information and to improve the dissemination of information services, but these efforts failed because of lack of equipment. In the past decades, whatever has been done in terms of the virtual library projects have not gone deeply enough to make any appreciable impact. However, some of the problems cited include lack of funds, lack of competent personnel with the technical-know-how of a virtual library,

computer phobia, and local resources for digitalization 1 lack of local resources (Gabje, 007). There is a lack of understanding, among the Virtual Library Board and how to build it, which has National Virtual Board and how to build it, which has contributed to the limited success of the project   Studies have shown that majority of the e universities in Nigeria, even those connectivity, are still at with good internet of the integration of ICT in teaching, learning,

research, library, information & and managerial policies. Digital libraries and virtual I libraries are major trends in the use of ICT for higher education. Nigeria should not be left behind and the government must be committed to seeing that ICT devices are encouraged and well established in the country. Furthermore, it may be that academic libraries can expand the universe of materials available more cost-effectively by the virtual project than they could by any other means. And it seems, to the researcher at least, that our academic libraries still have quite some ways to go to catch up with these digital trends.

It is pertinent to note, that building and sustaining a Virtual library requires the proper technological infrastructure: there should be a cooperative effort between universities, government agencies. The

Research Institutions and infrastructure includes telecommunication servers, application platforms and software applications. Infrastructural institutional well as human capital capabilities must be developed in other to face the challenges. As for the academic institutions, in the future, the library will probably structure its operations around three basic functions, according, to Atkinson (1990):

1. The e library will continue its s work of identifying and locating information in databases and helping users to access the information.

2.Traditional collection development through the creation of databases of carefully selected electronic publications. This task requires subject knowledge. Since it is necessary to understand the content and the importance of the constantly changing network from which the publications are selected.

3.The first two functions can be described as "down-loading and have their counterparts in traditional library work (i.e., reference work, cataloguing and collection development). The third function does not have its counterpart in the libraries of today. Atkinson uses the concept secondary record definition, and it can be characterized as an uploading function: the librarian incorporates into its databases papers from researchers and makes them available for the research community, and thus promotes both education and scientific exchange. In the era of print on paper, the reliance was commercial publishing, but now the electronic alternative can be both more economical and provide a technically better solution. The library's responsibility in the online era will be to provide the researcher with communication channels and to co-operate with researchers to establish technical and bibliographic standards and processes for online publishing.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Today, every academia Library is struggling with the demands of information technology, each is working to meet the public demand that more library services be delivered to the desktop. Around the click, and are doing so by adding technology to their existing book-based models s (Joanne, 1999), Each academic library in Nigeria should look for new and better ways to serve new and existing population sing technology. and this will promote the opportunity to build a virtual library. which in turn will enhance resource sharing among academe institutions. There is no doubt that the increase in the Value and information puts pressure on demand for on Nigerian university libraries to offer more effective services to users. The virtual Library and resource sharing component of a library automation system improves the productivity of the library staff. As user gain the ability to initiate their own requests, library staff will lab our- intensive process of keying in

he freed from the requests and tracking papers files and forms, and freed from the work of checking in and checking out books.

Ogunsola and Okusaga (2006) were of the view that various university virtual libraries will offer the best educational services fit for students and lecturers in any university, and the collaboration with universities and polytechnic virtual libraries will become part of a global academic spectrum, available to all academia in Nigeria and other developing countries". In line with this, academic libraries should find the right way to achieve balance between traditional values and the expectations and habits of the wired generations will determine whether libraries remain relevant in the social. Educational and personal contexts of the information age.

Building a virtual library must include stable electricity, and upgrading or installing a high speed internet connection to support a variety of servers for remote access HP servers for uploading and downloading large files, with appropriate digital library software in each higher institution Gbaje, 2007). Based on what has been presented in this paper so far the researcher may proffer the following recommendation:

i.   Universities libraries which are greatest and provides dispensers of information should be generously funded. Specifically, at least 20% of the parent organization approved recurrent budget should be set aside for librarian development including infrastructure

ii.   National information infrastructure (NII), should be supported with administrative and personnel infrastructure. Government broad vision should be to interconnect universities and information resources

iii.   University libraries should be encourage to expand their technological capabilities including patron and librarian training and awareness, to enable their users with full access to, and effective use of these emerging electronic services.

iv.   Realistic National information and Communication Infrastructure Policy should be addressed head-on in order to re-install and re-still meaningful and intellectually secure sense of direction for Nigerian Libraries irrespective types.

v.   Information technology literacy should also be developed in the mind of the citizens. Acquisitions of information, knowledge, or new technologies alone will not necessary empower unless that new knowledge is liberating and relevant to the lives of ends users.

vi.   Every university should be provided with all the necessary technology to access the virtual library.

vii.   Nigeria should play an active role in the actualization of the African Virtual University (AVU). This will provide access to, and will enable participants to tap into each other's ideas, knowledge, and experience. Leveraging existing universities and promoting the emergence of new institutions to share resources.

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