Review

Re-equipping the Nigerian public library system and services for the 21ist century

Eze Jacintha U.

Librarian 1, Enugu State Library Board, Enugu State, Nigeria.

The paper discussed the re-equipping of public library systems and services in Nigeria thus providing 21st services to clients. 21st century library and information services are characterized by advancement in the use of electronic means in the accessibility, retrieval and dissemination of information. This paper was introduced by a description of the nature and purpose of the public library. The meaning of information age which is a key feature of the 21ist century and its implications for library services were also discussed. The key features and requirements of automation and computerization of library services and how the public libraries can join their counterparts in advanced countries and other Nigerian academic libraries were looked at. Such features as acquisition and installation of computers, software selection, acquisition and installation requirements. Two surveys carried out in Nigerian public libraries were reviewed as related empirical studies used to show what the picture has been like with regards to automation and adapting to the requirements of the information era. Problems of the Nigerian public libraries in this era and the way forward for the libraries and librarians to join the trend in the new information environment with other advanced countries were discussed.

Key words: Nigeria, public library, information services, problems, opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of any library is the provision of information to its varied clientele. The public library in that it provides services to all members of the local community unlike the academic, special and school libraries which provide services to specific patrons. In the last few years, the rapid and developments in information technology have brought revolution in the way in which information is collected, displayed and accessed (IFLA, 2001). Many public libraries have to respond to the challenge of the electronic revolution which is charac-teristic of the 21ist century. To take advantage of the opportunities presented by information and communi-cation technology (ICT), there is a basic need for literacy, computer skills and reliable telecommunications networks

so as to close the information gap between the information rich and information poor people. The United Nations Report (1999) said that determined efforts are needed to bring developing countries and poor people everywhere into the "global conversation". This is because these countries offer a different perspective to geopolitical issues that presently western world have monopolized. Libraries generally and in particular public libraries usually play a key role in this regard being a library that serves and touches a variety of social issues through their resources and services.

Public libraries in the Nigerian context can help to bridge the "digital divide" by modernizing their services. Computerization and automation are typical features of

E-mail: ezejacinthaukamaka@yahoo.com.

the 21ist century libraries but it seems from observations so far, that only the academic and university libraries are yielding to this development. In order to provide meaningful services to satisfy our users, the public libraries and librarians need to be where their users are. Coping with the challenges of the information age means integrating and using information communication technology (ICT) facilities in library services delivery. Library users now clamor for electronic services in accessing, retrieval and dissemination of information. Some reasons why computer based system is very important in today's libraries are to provide a better service at lesser cost, provision of online access to much more information (by users and workers) and the library catalogue which could not have been easy via printed sources and making library services generally easier and faster.

Looking at what is happening in public libraries in more advanced places of the world, it will be obvious that the Nigerian public libraries and librarians lag behind. For instance, in Medellin, Colombia, Comfenalco Public Library has developed a website with up-to-date information about the city, including institutions, personalities, cultural events and procedures related to public services. It also publishes a series of guides on questions most frequently raised by users. Virtual public library in Denmark makes it possible to gain access to the catalogues of all public libraries plus the biggest research and special libraries. People are able to order an item from anywhere in the country and collect it at their local library (IFLA, 2001).

The story is also changing for a good number of academic libraries in Nigeria. Places like the Nnamdi Azikiwe library, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Kenneth Dike library, University of Ibadan, Hezekiah Oluwasami library, O.A.U. Ile Ife, John Harris library, University of Benin, to mention but a few are stronger in the automation of their libraries and library services.

The new information age

This new age in which we now live in according to Anyakoha is a revolutionary period whose impact is far surpassing those of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. Information has now become the most strategic resource that is transforming the world economy. ICT has brought about changes in different aspects of human life in the 21ist century. The new opportunities provided by ICT in business, learning, communication e.t.c. have catapulted the world into a new society called the knowledge society or information society (Anyakoha, 2005). Thus the world has become a global village. The internet where one can migrate from one chain of computers to the other is called the information super highway. Information Communication Technology, ICT has caused socio-cultural, political, edu-cational, and economic change. Just like Salisu (2002) noted, ICT has engendered a new approach to work and service delivery, and is a technological development that has changed work and job expectations. The library is one of the main areas deeply affected by ICT which is the backbone of information age. This is due to the fact that the library being the main stay of information and knowledge has been made virtual such that library and information services extend beyond walls and physical buildings.

Library work redefined

The work of librarians as Crosby (2001) is increasingly varied as it expands to keep up with the flow of information. As she said, librarians answer reference questions, and now they do it more efficiently and completely. Librarians organize books, but they rarely do that with card catalogues especially in advanced areas of the world. Now they use databases and digital metadata tags. However, despite its changing shape, the core of librarianship remains the same. Librarians still develop ways to make information useful; they still teach patrons how to evaluate sources and introduce children to reading and research. But now, they use new tools, handle more varied responsibilities, and have more opportunities to see their work reach beyond library walls.

Joining the "band wagon"

Notable changes are being felt in university and other academic libraries in the area for automation and compu-terization. As Ajidahun (2007) noted, university libraries in Nigeria are making frantic efforts to automate their operations. For the public libraries to be able to live up to the expectation of the 21st century library service, they cannot do without automation of their libraries which will encompass online connectivity via the Internet amongst other things. According to Achebe (2005), the status of ICT in Nigerian public libraries is nothing to write home about. These libraries need to acquire and install computers and software to carry out different library operations and routine work like their counterparts in universities and special libraries.

The practice of classification of documents in a library (for instance) which aims at bringing related documents close together in the physical arrangement in the stacks so that the users time is saved in locating all the documents relevant to a subject has also been touched by technology. The public librarians mainly use the standard classification schemes such as Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) etc for this purpose. The concept similar to classification developed by technologist is "Clustering" or "Cluster

Analysis" (Rao and Babu, 2001). Clustering attempts to divide a collection of documents into groups or clusters, such that, the documents in the same cluster have high degree of homogeneity and the documents in different clusters have high degree of heterogeneity. Most of the existing methods for document clustering are based on either probabilistic method such as Bayesian classification or distance and similarity measures such as K-Means analysis, hierarchical clustering and Nearest-Neighbour clustering.

Another development in the field of context information retrieval is the Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI). Most of the existing approaches to retrieving textual material from scientific databases depend on a lexical match between words in users request and those in or assigned to documents in a database. LSI is a completely automatic yet intelligent indexing method, widely applicable, and a promising way to improve users' access to textual documents.

Another information technology application similar to the document delivery or information dissemination in library science is the "Push and Pull technologies". These technologies have emerged as useful concepts to describe the operation of distributed information resources in different formats that is text, images, sound, and video. Traditional information distribution applications are based on request/reply model, whereas push and pull technologies are based on client/server model. Web browsing, library searches, FTP, GOPHER, WAIS are examples of pull technology and e-mails, telephone newscasts, electronic newsletter are the examples of push technology.

Key areas to be addressed

Acquisition and installation of computers

Acquiring and installing computers in the library form the base of library automation. Library computerization is the process of acquiring, installing and adequately utilizing computer hardware and software in carrying out library routine and other operations like cataloguing of books. It is usually accompanied by online connection and networking to and with other libraries. According to Obaseki (2011), computerization used to be accom-panied by utilizing other varying computer facilities like networking cables, software packages scanners e.t.c. in accomplishing library functions which were originally performed manually. Obaseki (2007) specified earlier on that computerizing the library functions and services encompasses the initial:

- Planning processes;
- Selection of hardware and software;
- Acquisition of selected software and hardware;

- Training of library personnel on the use;
- Maintenance of these novel system;
- Networking computer terminals (inter linking of computers);
- Retrospective conversion of the library collections – printed materials and artifacts records by means of computer software into machine readable options or formats.

All these areas need to be addressed by the Nigerian public libraries just like a good number of their counterparts in institutions – the academic libraries especially in the universities.

Software selection and utilization

The selection and acquisition of library software follows a process but most libraries especially in Nigeria do not observe this. That is why Ogenevwogaga et al. (n.d.) (cis.uws.ac.uk/…/softwareselection.pdf.)   recommended that software acquisition that known as in-house monitored computerized software should be adopted by libraries. In this practice, a computer firm will be contracted to develop the software but the library being involved in giving the expert some details that may be needed for expansion in the future – like the 'liberty' software recently developed for the National Open University of Nigeria NOUN.

Their study showed a variety of library software that has been used by different academic libraries and one public library in Nigeria; some of which are CDS/ISIS, TINLIB 2 used by the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, CDS/ISIS, TINLIB1 has been used in National Human Rights Commission Library, Abuja and currently X-LIB; TINLIB 1 used in Hezekiah Olowasanmi Library, O.A.U, Ile Ife, SLAM 1 used in John Harris Library, University of Benin, X-LIB 1 being used in Kwara State Library Board, Ilorin, TINLIB and ALICE 2 used in University of Ilorin Library, Ilorin. Amongst all the libraries, only Kwara State Library Board is a public library.

Ogenevwogaga et al. (n.d.) enumerated seven key steps that should guide a responsible software selection thus:

- Analyzing the needs and objectives of the software in line with the needs and objectives of the library.
- Specification of requirements for the software to be done by the library concerned especially before or at the time of the software development.
- Identifying promising software: The library must be able to identify a promising library software such that must be able to address the various library operations – cataloguing, acquisition, circulation and report generating e.t.c.
- The library also has to read relevant literatures and act on the usage by knowing more from other libraries that have used such software especially in the area of prospects and difficulties.

- Previewing the software with intended user group: Any library that want to select a software must involve the intending user group, as the users will be acquainted with difficulties and how flexible the software is, thereby making useful suggestions for the improvement of the software.
- Making recommendations on software for purchasing: After the previewing of the software, recommendations can be made for its purchase when the software has been test run and thoroughly evaluated to meet with the library needs and objectives.

Training in new skills

Another major area that needs to be addressed is training of staff to acquire new skills required to make use of computers and electronic gadgets – both hardware and software in accessing, retrieving and disseminating information and in carrying out other library routine work. According to Ajidahun (2007), library schools in Nigerian do not equip librarians with adequate technological and electronic skills. That is why many librarians in Nigeria today are not computer-literate. So, libraries need to provide training avenues and opportunities for their librarians more so in the area of computer and electronic skill acquisition.

A review of two related empirical surveys carried out in South-east public libraries

A survey was conducted in 2011 in the main public libraries of the South-east geopolitical zone on "cataloguing in the era of ICT: What is happening in South-east Nigerian public libraries". The five (5) main libraries of the five states of the South-east were surveyed. Data was collected using a structured interview guide administered to the librarians in charge of cataloguing in the libraries studied. Data was analyzed descriptively as well as using frequencies and percentages and presented in tables. Findings showed that although all the libraries could boast of a number of computers acquired mainly through donations, they are not used for library services; rather they are used for administrative purposes. Although three (3) (60%) of the libraries studied have installed Internet facility through dial-up servers and providers, none of them is functional. This has been due to lack of maintenance and fund to sustain the facilities.

2010 on "Open access to literature initiative: The perception and challenges to Nigerian public libraries and librarians". Data was collected using a structured interview guide administered to about 52 librarians in 6 public libraries from the different geopolitical zones of

the country. The main objective of the study was to find out how committed they were in research for professional development. Data was analyzed using frequencies and percentages as well as descriptively. Findings revealed that very few (about 30%) of the librarians in these public libraries engage in research and publications. This was found to be because of the fact that public libraries in Nigeria are not recognized as academic entity and as such, research, further studies and publications do not attract any straight forward benefits like promotions and conversions. For librarians to cope with the requirements of the 21st century library and information service, they need to engage in research and explore new areas of librarianship especially in this era of ICT.

THE CURRENT TREND IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Having seen the key areas to be addressed for the Nigerian public libraries to join the 'band wagon', it has been observed that automation which is the watch word is still seen as a myth in most Nigerian public libraries. The picture of the situation in most Nigerian public libraries is represented in Tables 1 and 2 using some public libraries.

A glance at the picture of the situation in some of the public libraries in Nigeria

Availability and use of ICT and electronic facilities in 5 public libraries of the South-east zone. The five public libraries of the five states of the South-east zone – Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States).

Training in new electronic skills: provisions made

It could be seen that the public libraries just like other Nigerian public libraries are still lagging behind as far as joining the "band wagon" in 21st century library and information services provision is concerned. Their librarians just hear about databases, online access as well new technological developments in information storage and retrieval; they know little or nothing about their usage. Also, training opportunities are not adequately provided by these libraries and few librarians are sponsored to generally organized workshops and conferences and rarely due to funding problems. It is worthy of note that the story is the same in most of the libraries mainly because they have the same source of funding.

Certain factors were found to pose problems to the actualization of automation and the use of ICT in these public libraries as well as many other Nigerian public libraries. Such factors include the followings.

Table 1. Situation in most Nigerian public libraries.

ICT	Available	%	Not available	%	Total	%
Computers for administrative purposes	5	100	-	-	5	100
Few computers for library routine	1	20	4	80	5	100
Computers for cataloguing	-	0	5	100	5	100
Functional internet	-	0	5	100	5	100
Software packages – inbuilt or acquired	-	0	5	100	5	100
Access to online databases	-	0	5	100	5	100
New technologies in information access and retrieval e.g. Latent semantic Indexing (LSI), Push and Pull technologies etc.	-	0	5	100	5	100

Table 2. Nigerian public libraries training in new electronic skills.

Training opportunities	Very adequate	%	Fairly adequate	%	Not adequate	%	Total	%
Conferences organized generally for librarians	-	0	5	100	-	0	5	100
Workshops organized by the individual libraries	-	0	-	0	5	100	5	100
Workshops attended outside the library	-	0	2	40	3	60	5	100
Training software packages	-	0	-	0	5	100	5	100

Lack of fund

Nwokocha (1998) lamented on the mode of funding and the ill-effect of poor funding of public libraries in Nigeria as a major problem that has persistently afflicted public library services delivery in Nigeria. The survey results discussed above complement this research. All the libraries indicated funding to be a major setback to carrying out automation and computerized activities in these public libraries. The subvention and overhead funds given to these libraries from the state governments can barely carry their salary paid to the workers leaving little or nothing to finance development of the library facilities.

Lack of ICT and other infrastructural facilities

These libraries lack infrastructures like steady power supply, internet facilities and even adequate number of computers to support automation. Most of the libraries agreed to have installed Internet facility in the past but none of them is functional presently. This has been due to lack of finance to sustain and maintain these facilities. Ebiwolate (2010) lamented on lack of ICT as one of the major problems facing Nigerian public libraries. This is primarily caused by inadequate funding of these public libraries.

Inadequate number of professionals and lack of skills and training

These libraries obviously do not have enough professionals as required and subsequently, there has been little or no training for the available workers towards acquiring the necessary skills in this regard. Adequate provisions are not made for the training of public librarians due to the lamented lack of fund. Even sponsorship to general professional workshops, seminars and conferences like that of Nigerian Library Association conferences and sessions cannot be afforded by most of the public libraries not to talk of special skill acquisition workshops that are likely to cost more.

Looking at the status of Nigerian public libraries generally in the area of ICT, Achebe (2005) discovered that most public libraries cannot afford some of the basic requirements of ICT for financial reasons. She stressed that most libraries depend on donations and donor agencies to acquire few computers and connect to the internet. In a nutshell, Achebe enumerated some factors that impinge on ICT applications in Nigerian public libraries as inadequate relevant ICT infrastructure particularly telecommunications facilities and power supply; uncooperative attitude of staff in the use of ICT; paucity of technical staff; problems of database conversion due to frequent changes in technology and lack of ICT policy amongst others. The government that has the sole

responsibility of establishing and maintaining public libraries does not see libraries and their affairs as a priority in ensuring personal and community growth and development.

CONCLUSION

Studies, observations and researches have shown that the status of ICT in Nigeria public libraries is still generally poor. The struggle for and impact of automation/computerization and the required staff training to that effect have been felt to a high extent in the academic and special libraries while most public libraries are still battling with funding problems.

Most of the public libraries acquire most of their facilities through gifts and donations. Some notable sources of such donations are bodies like the Book Aid International, Educational Trust Fund ETF, NGOs and concerned groups like the Enugu State Cultural Association in Southern California ESCASC in Enugu State Library. Although some of the libraries do retouch and renovate their buildings, necessary facilities to support core library services in the electronic world are still grossly inadequate – functional Internet, computerized and online systems. This is coupled with lack of required staff training and poor remuneration of the workers which make their morale and job satisfaction very low. Although government and non-governmental bodies mainly at the state level, are proposing to upgrade the status of the different public libraries through building and integrating e-library services and facilities, no tangible move has been made if not for few computer donations that are occasionally made to these libraries.

RECOMMENDED WAY FORWARD

How would Nigerian public libraries actualize their dreams and adapt to the automated and electronic information environment of the 21[ist] century? Indications, observations and findings showed that without positive change in the funding of public libraries in government budgets, the dream of providing training to librarians, services and resources to the citizens of Nigeria will not be actualized. There is need for Nigerian public libraries to have the support through funding to provide resources and services for today's users and meeting up the standard of 21ist century libraries, having been equipped with current ICT facilities like functional internet, computers and related infrastructure like stable power supply. There is dire need for recruiting both professional and non-professional staff in adequate numbers as well training them to acquire contemporary computer literacy and skills for electronic information accessibility, retrieval and dissemination.

Training opportunities should be provided for public librarians to help them acquire skills and knowledge needed to carry the public library services to the next level. This is being observed in many academic libraries in Nigeria these days. The public library section of the Nigerian Library Association should liaise with the parent body, NLA to re-brand public libraries in Nigeria and sensitize the government on the need to beef up the general standard of the public library resources, services and remuneration of staff.   All these revolve around adequate funding.

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