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### Editorial

This edition of our Journal carries twenty five (25) articles coming from within and outside Nigeria. It is interesting to note that in its humble beginning the journal has caught the attention of scholars who continue to send us their manuscripts. While a greater number of these articles were written by single authors we have also received an appreciable number of papers which are products of collaborative research works.

We thank all contributors to this edition and hope they will not relent in their efforts to carry out more stimulating research works for others to benefit. As usual our doors are open to meaningful suggestions that would improve this journal in every ramification. Because this edition did not come out early some of the articles published were not received in 2003.

**Dr. Emmanuel MK Dawha**  
**Editor-in-Chief**  
**2003**



Contents	page
Editorial Board	ii
Notes to Contributions	iii
Editorial	iv
<b>Relevant Issues in the Provision of Digital Information in</b>	
<b>Africa-A. Alemna and M. Cobblah: .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Bulge in the Boa ..... Backlog in a Nigerian Academic</b>	
<b>Library, Management Experience-M. Bello: .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Public Library and Information Services to Children and Youth</b>	
<b>in Nigerian- Daniel D. Boman &amp; Rose Mommoh: .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Collect size and Inter-library Lending in Federal University Libraries</b>	
<b>in the North-Eastern Nigeria- Ibrahim Haruna and Bola M. Akinnigbagbe: ....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Bibliographic Instruction in use of Library: A Survey of University for</b>	
<b>Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana- M.A. Bello and A.K. Ibrahim: .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Engineering and Information Technology for Sustainable Economic Growth</b>	
<b>in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria-Ishanya D. Marama: .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>User studies as a Technique for knowing Information Needs of Company</b>	
<b>Employees in Nigeria-Yahaya I. Harande: .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Dressing Code Compliance in Academic Libraries: A Case study</b>	
<b>of Igbinedion University Library, Okada-Olaojo P. Olatunji: .....</b>	<b>79</b>



<b>Citation Analysis of the Literature used in Political Science Doctoral Theses and Dissertations in the University of Lagos, 1991-2000:</b>	
<b>Implications for Collection Development-H.S. Igberongbe:</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Availability and use of Audio-Visual Resources in Nigerian Universities of Science and Technology Libraries-J.E. Akpena:</b>	
	<b>104</b>
<b>Conservation of Library Resources in Adamawa State Public Libraries-Margaret B. David:</b>	
	<b>116</b>
<b>Changing Roles Between the Professional and Para-Professional Librarians and Job Satisfaction in Six Libraries in Lagos State: A Survey-E.A. Adekanye:</b>	
	<b>127</b>
<b>Adamawa State Public Libraries: A Survey of Users Satisfaction-Lydia D. Besso:</b>	
	<b>140</b>
<b>Staff Development for Academic Librarians: The Case of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi Nigeria-James O. Adelusi:</b>	
	<b>149</b>
<b>Stocktaking Management in Academic Libraries: A Case study of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi, Nigeria-Samuel O. Oji:</b>	
	<b>156</b>
<b>Women Librarians as Managers in Nigerian Universities: Tokenism at the Top-S.A. Ogunrombi and H.C. Pisagih:</b>	
	<b>168</b>
<b>Participation of Librarians in the Activities of the Nigerian Library Association (N. L.A) orno State Chapter-Yahaya A. Aliyu and Camble E.:</b>	
	<b>185</b>
<b>Strategic Uses of Information Technology in Library Management-Patrick A. Ozoalori:</b>	
	<b>198</b>



Information Utilization as a Correlation of Personnel Effectiveness in some Selected Publishing firms in Ibadan Nigeria-Bamigboye O. Bamidele and Aderibigbe N. Adeniyi: .....	210
Integrated Pest Management for Academic Libraries-Victoria Lawal: .....	218
Computer Literacy: A Necessity for Library Staff-Obaje A. Michael: .....	225 ✓
Studies on the Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Science Based Postgraduate Students in a Nigerian University; A Case Study of University of Jos- V.C. Nwokedi and T. Ogundare: .....	232
Mentoring in a Nigerian Technological University Library-Samuel A. Ogunrombi:.....	244
Government Documents in University Libraries of Developing Nations: The Experience in Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria-Oshinaike, A.B: .....	254
A Medical Library Reflected by its Clientele-Joseph O. Aina: .....	260



# COMPUTER LITERACY: A NECESSITY FOR LIBRARY STAFF

BY

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## Abstract

*The concept of computer literacy has existed for quite sometime and still has merit. By looking at the history of the computer literacy movement, we can build a definition for the next century and conclude that learning and use of computer is a necessity for library staff.*

## History of the Computer Literacy

In 1980, the National Science Foundation (NSF) held a conference that gathered computer Scientists and classroom teachers in United States to make the first attempts at defining computer literacy, as well as indicating that it was a multifaceted idea (Scott, 2004:1).

The marketing of desktop computers in the early 1980s marked another rise of the computer literacy movement. The general populace was introduced to the idea of owning personal computers, corresponding with the introduction of the IBM and Macintosh Apple PCs. Time Magazine even named the computer its man of the Year in 1982. The eighties brought the computer out of laboratories and into homes, setting the stage for a new era of thinking about these machines. Norman (1984) stated that:

Computer literacy is a common slogan that whets the appetite of politicians and academics.

But what does it mean? How could we produce it? Computer literacy can mean different things; there is not just a single concept involved, but a large variety of them<sup>5</sup>



Norman proposed a scheme for four levels of computer literacy. The first level is the basic general concepts, to which the understanding of algorithms, architectures, and databases was key. The second level requires an understanding of how to use a computer and accomplish something useful with it. The third level was the ability to program and the fourth level was the understanding of the science of computation, or "where the professional resides". According to Norman, everyone should achieve at least the second level of his computer literacy scale. Besser (1993) noted that:

Anyone involved in discussion around the development of a computer literacy curriculum in the 1980s recognises the ambiguity of the term. Courses in programming, word processing, and even in explanations of basic components (such as how to use a floppy disk) all were termed Computer literacy<sup>3</sup>

He further asked, "what do computer literacy courses teach? Of course they teach familiarity with the computer, floppy disks, the mouse, and so on; but on a deeper level, one of the primary things they teach is to think in the kind of linear, logical fashion that is currently necessary in order to interact with a computer."<sup>3</sup>

Alfred Bork (1993) also states that: "computer literacy is like motherhood in that most people are in favour of it. But unlike motherhood, it does not have a clear and precise definition".<sup>2</sup>

In the 1990s, the concentration of computer literacy discussion focused on the computer literacy of educators. Even then the definition was split between the ability to program, having only a general awareness of how to use a computer, or some point in-between where the user can use most programs, but has no knowledge about the specific workings of computers or programming



## Computer Literacy Today

The meaning of the term computer literacy kept changing and altering, with those writing about it being drawn toward one of two sides of the issue; one side being the complete understanding camp and the other campaigning for simply knowing how to use computers, but not how they work.

Some of the computer literacy fervour has shifted to a concept termed information literacy. Information literacy is usually defined as the combination of traditional literacy concepts and fundamental computer – literacy skills. When one talks about information literacy, the computer skills component is usually assumed or a secondary thought after the skills of assessing and using information.

Today, it is right to say that, to be a productive member of society, an individual must know about computers. According to Bork (1993) "Everyone will need to be computer literate in the society of the future because computers will be widely used in all activities". As cliché as the statement is, nothing sums it up better than the future is today. What once was an extraordinary knowledge is now a necessary skill in most homes and almost all workplaces.

Some argue today that being able to use the computer for a specific task, such as e-mail or a specialised program in the workplace, is not the same as being computer literate; using computers to meet immediate needs defines only the proficiency level of the user. Being able to do simple tasks does not mean the person is computer literate, but simply proficient in those simple tasks. This led to the argument that computer literacy means being able to understand how the computer works.

Computer literacy should be considered a general measurement. People are deemed literate if they can read and write, but literacy is rarely qualified in everyday conversation beyond grade-level proficiency. With this, a person is either computer literate or not based on how proficient they are at some basic computer tasks. Literacy suggests understanding and the ability to adapt and increase that understanding.



## OBAJE A. MICHAEL

Computer proficiency should describe the skills needed to do whatever tasks are necessary on the computer. Proficiency is not literacy, but the ability to do things based on rote memorisation or using very little adaptation. You can, however, use proficiencies to estimate a person's computer literacy.

### The Role of Libraries

What does computer literacy mean for library staff – paraprofessionals and professionals alike? The demand for computer-related skills has moved from insignificance to being critical for most academic library positions. Other types of libraries have shown this increased demand as well.

The most important role of libraries is an increased emphasis on training. Libraries must increase the amount of computer training available to their staff, professionals and paraprofessional alike. Whether through in-house training or staff attendance of outside workshops – training must be an integral part of the libraries' staff development. There must also be a concerted effort to hire people with computer skills to train staff on the relevant skills needed to provide the necessary services to users.

If training made an integral part of the library mission, then the library should be aggressive at adopting computer literacy and be willing to dedicate human and financial resources toward that end. They must also be able to keep up with technological changes. Training should be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury; as mandatory, not voluntary; and as comprehensive, not superficial. If library staffs are lagging behind in computer literacy, we may see libraries further threatened by extinction.

Training must include more than the basics. There must be continual effort for skills improvement. Basic computer literacy for library staff is the goal, but there is no end game. Technology changes and the better trained a staff is, the better he/she can handle those changes. Patrons today expect their libraries to provide technological information solutions both on and offsite. In turn, library



## Computer Literacy

staff needs to be ready to learn new techniques and tools in order to provide training onsite or online, develop new programs or services as a part of a team, or learn how a particular piece of hardware or software works.

According to Minnesota Voluntary Library Certification Program(2000), a program for Library Employees, a certified library employee should be able to:

- a. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the role technology plays in the creation, retrieval and delivery of library resources, functions and services.
- b. Incorporate computer based resources and new technology in library services.
- c. Demonstrate basic skills in the use of audio-visual equipment.
- d. Demonstrate knowledge and use of appropriate computer hardware and software applications for library functions and services.
- e. Use basic reference, information and referral resources.
- f. Use the entire library collection to satisfy user requests.
- g. Instruct users on the use of library materials and equipment.
- h. Describe how people communicate needs, search for information and receive information.
- i. Demonstrate knowledge of basic computer operations needed to use the local system.
- j. Incorporate appropriate new technologies into technical services functions.



**OBAJE A. MICHAEL**

### **CONCLUSION**

It is of a necessity that a library staff be computer literate with the continuing increase of reliance on computers and networks, library staff of all levels need to be able to adapt to this ever-changing technology. This does not mean, however, that all library staff members have to become system managers. Achieving the target level of computer literacy is not a difficult goal to accomplish if there is commitment on the part of institutions and library staff. Achieving library-wide baseline literacy is only the beginning; continuous training helps to create a more adaptable workforce.



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