THE FATE OF INTERMEDIARY LIBRARY STAFF IN THE ERA OF ICTs IN NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT:

The paper explained how the traditional or analogue libraries have been transformed into a digital library with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The concept of ICT based on libraries were highlighted as electronic library, virtual library, digital library, community library, library without walls, the library of the future etc, ICT facilities available for the library and information centre were also provided such as computers, printers, email, UPS, CDROMs, Scanners, Printers, Satellites, Internet, intranet, Connectivity, V-SAT, online Databases, Websites, etc and the advantage of using them were highlighted such as Provision of remote access information to users and access to unlimited information from different sources. Challenges of ICT in the library were also highlighted, such as Lack of adequate trained manpower in the use of IT. The service provided by library and information centre with ICT was also provided such as remote enquiry services, Interactive services, Catalogue on Web, the services of the intermediates or paraprofessional staff may not be undermined, because they are also very important in the modern day library. They assists the professional staff in the library such as register users online, transform the physical form of catalogue into the online public access catalogue (OPAC), answering users queries online, charging and discharging and giving online literacy instructions to users as part of digital reference service. Also, the paper conclude that, intermediary library staffs must acquire all the requisite skill through training and retraining for capacity building in the area of ICTS in the library.

Keyword: Fate: Intermediary: Library staff: ICTs: Nigerian context

INTRODUCTION

The whole world is gradually turning into a global village due to the advent of information and communication technology (ICT). The Librarian of today is much more than a mere keeper of books or a custodian of archival materials but rather a digital librarian and an information professional because of the advent of ICTs which has totally revolutionalize the services provided by the librarian and libraries in the modern era.

Chowdhury and Margariti (2004) noted that the introduction and development of the internet and its associated web technologies in the past decade, have significantly influenced both the way libraries provides information services to their users, and the way users chose to access information.

With ICTs, most libraries are trying to meet the needs of the academic and rural community by improving their services and enhancing their resources. That is why Mohammed (1997) was of the view that information technology is rapidly transforming the content and services of libraries in the modern era.

Also, Opara (2006) noted that in this last decade or so that libraries have become more sophisticated and more ICTs dependent. Virtually all aspects of library operations are affected by ICTs.

Ajibero (2003) also pointed out that, as a result of the impact of ICTs on technical services of the library, the roles of cataloguers have completely changed. He explained that the introduction of computers into cataloguing marked a turning point in the way and manner it is being done and by whom it is being done.

Nwalo (2007) stated that the intermediate staff often called the paraprofessional in the library can now effectively perform much of the duties that hitherto were exclusively preserved for the professional because of the advent and use of ICTs in the library. Today, paraprofessionals not only help their users at the circulation desk, but also in cyber space. This service is referred to as digital reference, real-time reference, or e-reference services.

Concept of ICT

Information Communications Technologies (ICT) - technologies that enable society to create, collect, consolidate, communicate, manage and process information in multimedia and various digital formats for different purposes i.e. computing and telecommunications

Technologies like the personal computer, CD-ROM, cable TV, cellular phones and the internet. ICT which is known as information and communication technology has been defined by many scholars and researchers as follows. Ebijuwa (2005) defined ICTs as tools used for collection, processing, storage, transmission and dissemination of information.

To Anyakoha (2005) ICTs are the electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information. While American Library Association ALA (1983) defined information technology which is also part of ICTs as the application of computers and other technologies to the acquisitions, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. They further explained that computers are basically used to process and store data in the library, while telecommunication technology provides information, gadgets that makes it possible for users to access databases and link them with other computer networks in different location. Because of the exponential growth in knowledge and information, the traditional responsibilities of the libraries which is to collect, organize, preserve and retrieve records of human achievement have to be integrated with ICTs. Libraries and information centre's now use information and communication technologies to provide their services and organize their collections in an electronic format.

The ICT-based libraries can be referred to as electronic library, virtual reality, digital library, community library, library without walls, the library of the future, etc. However, for simplicity, virtual library can be conceived as an organized collection of documented information resources not limited by physical structure and printed format but also including electronically stored information and information resources accessed physically and remotely irrespective of the time and the location of the user and /or the information resource with the assistance of the ICTs. A typical virtual library has no limit to its size, content, the nature of physical(tangible)and/or electronic information resource (intangible), and the type of user, time of access, and the need for and nature of use. By and large, it aims at promoting information access and sharing rather than ownership of the information resources per se, as they can easily be accessed irrespective of their location and ownership worldwide using the ICTs.

Anaehobi (2007) pointed out that, today library users prefer electronic resources like e-journals e-book, e-newspapers, e-thesis and dissertation, e-books and internet, rather than the traditional printed information resources so therefore, the modern librarian or digital librarian sees ICTs as a significant development that provides tools for managing the avalanche of information generated by the modern society.

ICT facilities available use for the library

ICTs have been the basis for human existence from time immemorial and this has driven man to continuously seek ways to improve the processing of information and communicating such information to one another irrespective of distance and on a real-time basis (Ndukwe, 2002). Surviving in the information age depends on access to national and global information networks. ICTs are the bedrock for the survival and development of any nation in a rapidly changing global environment, and it challenges us to devise initiatives to address a host of issues such as reliable infrastructure, skilled human resources, open government, and other essential issues of capacity building (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001).

At the heart of technology lie two main or branches of technology: computing and telecommunication. The technologies covered are the computer system, Internet/electronic mail (e-mail), mobile phone, and fax machine. The following facilities can be can be use in library and information centre such as

Computers, UPS, CDROMs, SCANNER, PRINTER, SATELLITE, Internet, intranet, Connectivity, V-SAT, online Databases, Websites, MAST, LAN, MAN, WAN, HDR HDROM, Mobile Phones etc

Computers

A computer is a machine with electronic and electromechanical parts. It is programmable and is capable of performing the following basic computing functions: Accept data (input), Process data, Generate output (information), Store data/information, Retrieve/send data/information

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Computers were originally used by scientists for calculating numbers, and have gradually become useful in offices and industries. In recent times, simplified models that can be used by almost everybody have become common in schools and homes for accomplishing many varied tasks and applications (Madu 2000)

Fapohunda (1999) lists the uses that computers are now commonly put to: writing letters, and reports, printing books, newspapers, and magazines, drawing pictures and diagrams, doing statistics, mathematics and handling financial records, controlling traffic lights, flying aeroplanes, making and playing music and video, sending messages anywhere in the world.

Internet

The Internet is a global network of computers communicating under one set of guidelines, formally called the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). The Internet is a global collection of many types of computers and computer networks that are linked together. It is increasingly becoming the solution to many information, problems, information exchange (Adesanya, 2002). Eseyin (1997) describes the Internet as a mixture of many services with the two most commonly used being electronic mail (e-mail for short) and the World Wide Web (www). It plays a significant role in education, health, political processes, agriculture, economy, businesses and newsgroups.

Intranet

Intranets use Internet standards, protocols and technologies to provide a closed network within an organization. An Intranet is an internal corporate network that provides access to information and allows communication limited only to within an organization.

Network

A network is a collection of computers, communications hardware and software linked together to allow sharing of resources and to provide a facility for communication. Such as

a. Local Area Network (LAN) – a network that serves users within a confined area such as a building or a campus
b. Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) – covers a geographic area the size of a city,
c. Wide Area Network (WAN) – covers a wide geographical area such as a country or the entire globe. The Internet is the best example of a WAN.

E-mail

Electronic mail (e-mail) is the exchange of text messages and computer files transmitted via communications networks such as the Internet (Nwosu, 2004). Fapohunda (1999) sees the e-mail system as the equivalent of postal mailing services, with the biggest difference being the time and cost involved. And not only written data, but all sorts of information in the form of video, audio, or photographs, can be sent via e-mail. Oketunji (2000) describes e-mail as an increasing popular method of communication, especially in the workplace.

Mobile Phones

Bittner (1989) defines mobile phones as a telephone system that can move or be moved easily and quickly from place to place. Mobile phones were once the tool of rich and busy executives who could afford both the luxury. Mobile phones are now the ICT that is reshaping and revolutionizing the communications globally. According to Marcelle (2000), the availability of this new technology has been reshaping the material basis of the society as well as bringing about a profound restructuring of economic, education, political, and cultural relations among states. Nigeria is not an exception.

According to Tiemo (2006) the importance of information cannot be overemphasized. People need information to plan and carry out their decisions. More than 90 percent of Africa's population could greatly benefit from information on better choice of food, safe water and basic nutrition, child care, family planning, immunization, prevention and control of endemic diseases. The combination of modern communication devices could play significant roles in the collection and dissemination of global information.

Fax machine

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Telefacsimile systems permit the transaction of images (photos, printed images, maps, drawings) and their reproduction on paper at a remote receiver. Facsimile (fax) is not a new service; however, advances in digital imaging technology and microelectronics have caused a sharp drop in prices with a significant increase in capacities (O'Brien, 1996). "Long distance copying" might be an appropriate nickname for this telecommunication process. Any document, whether it is handwritten, contains pictures, diagrams, graphs, charts or typed text can be transmitted at a great speed for relatively low cost. The fax system is widely available; most organizations have at least one fax machine.

ADVANTAGES OF USING ICTS IN THE LIBRARY

Hinderson (1992), highlighted the advantages of using ICTs to include

1. Provision of remote access information to users
2. Provision of speedy and easy access to information
3. Access to unlimited information from different sources
4. Provision of round the clock access to users
5. ICTS provides facility for the reformatting and combination of data from different sources.
6. ICTs help to provide digital references services
7. Provides flexibility to be used by any individual according to his/her requirement.

Impact of ICT on the library and other information centers

a. ICT made information creation in digital format possible.

b. ICT made online access and file transfer possible.

c. ICT made networking and sharing of information resources possible

Challenges of ICT in the library

a. Lack of national policies promoting ICT as a tool for development of library systems and services.
b. Lack of adequate trained manpower in the use of IT.
c. Lack of funds for acquiring necessary hardware and software facilities.
d. Resistance on the part of library staff to change from their traditional practices to the use of IT.
e. Poor resource allocation for infrastructure improvement and collection development for public libraries.
f. Lack of sufficient sanctioned posts, forcing most services to be operated by voluntary nonprofessional staff, which damages information organization and services.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY LIBRARIES WITH ICTS

Wandollah and Sigh (2009) explained some of the services provided by

Libraries in the era of ICTS to include:-

1. Remote enquiry services: This is an interface that allows users to place queries electronically through web form
2. Catalogue on Web: Libraries now have online public access catalogues (OPAC) to make users to be aware of their collections even outside the library building. The OP AC helps users to search library database in order to see if the library holds a particular work on a particular subject and also be informed of the location of those works
3. Websites: Libraries in the era of ICTS provides links to internet resources, and other related websites, electronic books and journals which are reserved for specific use
4. Interactive services: Libraries in the era of ICTs also provided Interactive services Such as loan status check and fines accrued, online renewal, new acquisition, charged books reservation, purchase suggestion and interlibrary loan request. In addition libraries in the era of ICTs provides links to other library OPACs within and outside the library

THE FATE OF INTERMEDIATE STAFF WITH ICTs IN LIBRARY

The Intermediate staffs often called the paraprofessional are the caliber of staff that possesses little training in the area of librarianship and so they serve as the supporting staff to the professionals in the library.

Nwallo (2007) states that, paraprofessionals in libraries can now effectively perform much of the duties 'that hitherto were exclusively delegated to professionals because of ICTS. She further explained that in the cataloguing unit of libraries, paraprofessionals can conveniently do some of

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the work solely meant for professionals, with the database installed in the library, the paraprofessionals in the cataloguing unit can enter all the bibliographic details of a book which the professional use to catalogue a book in the manual catalogue.

Also in the area of providing reference services, the intermediate or paraprofessionals staff in the reference unit can serve as a mediator between the library customers and the information and the navigator of information super high way as pointed out by Schement (2002). Being a supportive staff to the professionals in the library, the paraprofessionals always assists the professional librarian to respond to user queries via internet, and also point out to user the right information resources to use through online literacy instructions.

The above is often referred to as virtual reference services, digital reference, and real-time reference or e- reference services. ALA (2005) defined virtual reference service as the reference service that is initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons employ computers with reference staff without being physically present. In other words, virtual reference services solely on the use of the internet by users to connect with a virtual plane.

Also, paraprofessionals help users in the circulation unit or desk as the case may be. In the circulation unit paraprofessionals register user's online, charge and discharge books online, check loan status to users and fined accrued, and also renewal of books borrowed online. In addition, the paraprofessionals "can assist the users to locate materials found in the online public access catalogue (OPAC).

CONCLUSION

The library cannot exist without the paraprofessionals or intermediate staff even with the advent of ICTs in the modern era. This is because the professionals cannot do all the work; they must be assisted by the intermediate staff.

Nevertheless, for the intermediate staff to be relevant in the era of ICTs, they must acquire all the requisite skill through training and retraining for capacity building in the area of ICTS in the library.

Also, in addition, librarians in the era of ICTS must seize to be called analogue librarian providing services in the traditional library settings, but rather a digital librarian using the various ICTs facilities to acquire, organize and disseminate information within and outside the library building.

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