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DIGITAL LITERACY INCLUSION: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NEW NORMAL

BY

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Abstract

Higher education in recent years has witnessed dynamic changes due to the Coronavirus pandemic to the extent that a new term, 'new normal,' originated. In this regard, teaching and learning processes have significantly become dependent on digital technologies to warrant emphasis being laid on digital literacy skills, which many learners lack. In order words, the growing prominence of the Internet and other digital environments as educational tools requires research regarding learners' digital literacy and the role of librarians in supporting learning in the new normal. Digital literacy is the learners' ability to locate, organise, understand, evaluate, and create information using digital technology effectively for everyday tasks. Therefore, the paper's thrust is in the role of librarians as information providers in higher institutions of learning in promoting reading, teaching, research, and learning culture among the citizenry in the digital environment. Also, the paper gives an insight into the digital environment and the various e-learning platforms such as Moodle, Google classroom and so on. It concluded by recommending digital literacy skills inclusion in the school curriculum. Higher institutions should set clear policies that provide the appropriate learning environment to facilitate technology and libraries to support context learning and promote e-learning platforms in every discipline.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, E-Learning, Higher Education, Librarians, Library.

Introduction

Education is the main instrument in bringing about changes in the quality of lives of individuals and the society in which they live. According to Fafunwa (1980), education is regarded as a tool for the development of society. The quality of education of the people determines the rate of their development and growth. In this wise, both government and parents strive to promote education to get high-quality people to work towards societal development. Education, therefore, is the process through which the society regenerates itself and hands down not only the culture but also discoveries, inventions, institutional memory and its entire wealth and expertise to the younger generations. According to Adebika (2018), education is the soul of societal developments; and University is at the apex of the educational system charged with the responsibility of preparing graduates to become professionally and socially responsible citizens and be responsive to global problems, challenges and opportunities. Nowadays, technology has penetrated the classrooms and lecture halls; and the use of the technology for teaching and learning has significantly impacted academics survival in some climes during corona virus/COVID-19 pandemic which brought about the term “New normal” which could be defined as a situation where exceptions become compulsorily accepted or adopted as the rules also situation when teaching and learning migrated to virtual environment with the inclusion of technologies. Higher education system is in a continuous process of change particularly with the universities having to keep pace with students' needs, desires, and requirements. Thus, digital technology in the classroom/lecture hall warrants digital literacy inclusion to leverage effective conduct of teaching, learning and research activities in higher education in the new normal.

Objectives of the Study

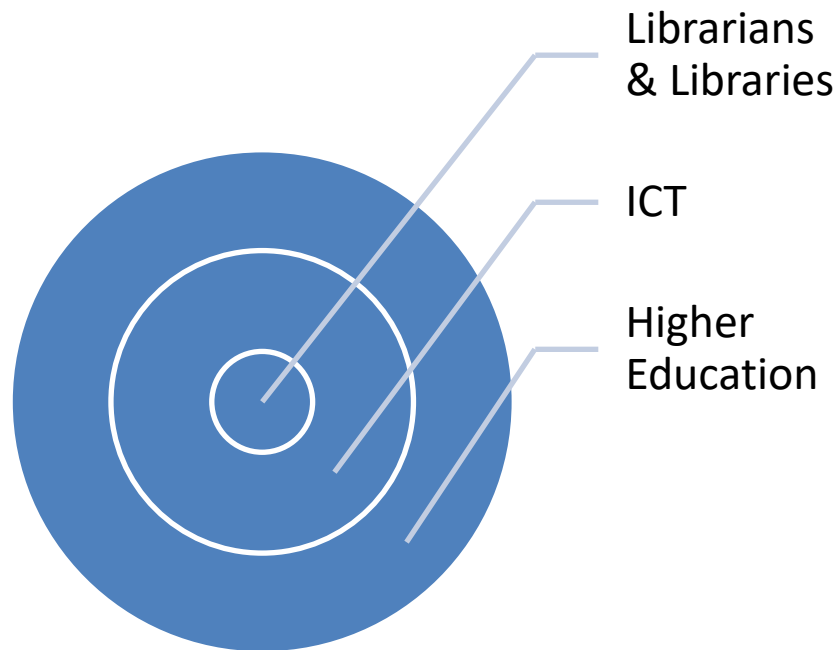
- To examine the digital environment, ICTs and their impact on higher education in the new normal;

- To examine concept of Libraries in higher education;
- Examine the Digital literacy and its effects in higher education in the new normal;
- To identify virtual paltforms for higher education in the new normal; and
- To examine the roles of librarians in promoting digital inclusion in higher education.

Conceptual framework

The Interconnectivity of Cardinal Variables in Higher Education in the New Normal comprises three concentric circles of Lirarians/Libraries, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Higher Education.

Figure1: The Interconnectivityof Cardinal Variablesin Higher Education in the New Normal



At the core of the framework are the Librarians and Libraries due to the pivotal role they play in academic development in terms of teaching and research. The centre place of the pivotal role of the library is underpinned by the emphasis that is universally laid at the relevance of the libraries to the establishment and development of higher education. In Nigeria for instance, no institution of higher education can be licensed to operate by the Nigerian University Council(NUC) without a well equipped library with qualified personnel and standard reading materials. Even in a full-fledged institution, the activities of the library

with its professionals are indispensable to the successful accreditation of existing programmes. ICT occupies the second concentric circle to reflect its indispensability in the development of institutions of higher education particularly in the new normal when the sanctity of education must be maintained while social distancing is mandatory. In the hands of savvy librarians, use of ICT is critical to the process of upholding the tenets of higher education under a life threatening situation like the one precipitated by corona virus pandemic which the world is still fighting to mitigate. The outer concentric circle is where we have higher institutions, the beneficiaries that depend on the inner variables to fulfil their obligations to the society at large.

Librarians and Libraries in Higher Institution

The fact that the library is a growing organism was posited by Barner (2011); Librarians and Libraries in higher learning institutions are to be active and while constantly displaying high level of resilience, which is a prerequisite of changing roles for library staff as academics. The survival of any organization like the library which is a learning organization can be seen from two main perspectives, the analytical and normative arguments. According to the normative argument, to survive in dynamic environments entails a capacity to learn and to remain viable in an environment characterised by uncertainty and change in addition to the fact that organisations and individuals alike depend upon an ability to learn. For example, the analytical argument posits “that organisational learning Creates idyllic environments in which people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn” (Senge, 1990). This means that library staff must be innovative and creative for them to be able to seamlessly adapt and remain relevant in the ever-changing web environment of contemporary times and going by their nature of training, librarians promote use of information resources in

any format. Librarians provide library and information services to meet the users' information needs, be it for learning or leisure. Library services limited to circulation services, reference services and much more have extended to one-on-one services either physically or online (Martínez-Arellano, 2013). Information services include current awareness service, selective dissemination of information, reference service, readers advisory, and lots more. Adequate provision of these services will help in preventing societal stagnation.

Institutions of higher learning, such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, have libraries because of their exceptional support for academic pursuit; they are expected to produce high-quality graduates that will become society's workforce. To achieve the fundamental goals of education in any organisation, the quality of libraries services must be in tune with the technology trends. Libraries worldwide share the glory of every developed society because no society develops without research, and research outputs are managed and disseminated to users for further studies by libraries from generation to generation. Libraries can be seen as extensions of education to improve users' knowledge by providing them access to various information resources to meet their individual needs at their own pace. Libraries are at the forefront in deploying strategies for providing services for the growth of the parent institutions and the benefit of the user community. Libraries in higher institutions create avenues for the availability of needed information resources to support teaching, learning and research activities that aid education and knowledge.

Digital Environment and Information Communication Technologies in Higher Education

Information and communication technology has permeated every aspect of human endeavour. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a force for human existence, especially in the educational milieu. The academia and consultants progressed from providing simple teaching aids to interactive learning environments. With the Covid -19 pandemic globally, the

inclusion of e-learning platforms has been on the increase. According to Suresh, Priya, and Gayathri (2018), internet technologies facilitate the distribution of content at the same time to a large number of users; E-learning stages offer numerous benefits to students like authority over the content, control over the time spent learning, and thus hence the interaction can be adjusted by the student needs and goals of learning. They also give an account of a study involving 424 universities around the world that revealed that institutions were affected by the pandemic in terms of research, conferences, international mobility and education delivery, most universities stating that they had to adopt online learning and had to face many challenges, the most important being access to technology and teachers' ability to deliver online courses.

Table 1:Some Virtual Platforms for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

S/N	Virtual Platforms	Brief Description	Useful URL
1	Google meet	Google Hangouts Meet, or just Meet, gives educators face-to-face time with their students - the best alternative to teaching from a physical classroom. With Hangouts Meet, schools can maintain the flow of communication - between students, parents, guardians and fellow faculty members - across a secure platform.Meet integrates seamlessly with other products like Classroom, Slides, Docs, and Gmail.	https://edu.google.com/products/meet/
2	Cisco Webex meetings	It is a secure and easy-to-use web-based learning experience to join or host the class session, listen and search recordings, track class attendance and more	https://www.webex.com/industries/education.html
3	Go to meeting	Go To meeting enhances communication across the entire education network as it enables virtual office hours and on demand content with unlimited cloud recording.	https://www.goto.com/education
4	Microsoft team	Microsoft Teams is a digital hub that brings conversations, content, assignments, and apps together, letting educators create vibrant learning environments. Build collaborative classrooms, connect in professional learning communities, and connect with colleagues – all from a single experience.	https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/remote-learning-edu

		<p>Within Teams, educators can quickly converse with students, share files and websites, create a OneNote Class Notebook, and distribute and grade assignments. Built-in OneNote Class Notebooks and end-to-end assignment management allow educators to organise interactive lessons and provide adequate and timely feedback. Educational institute administrators and staff can stay updated and collaborate using Staff Teams for announcements and topical conversations. Educators can share instructional material using Professional Learning Communities.</p>	
5	Moodle	<p>Moodle is a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments</p>	<p>https://moodle.org/ https://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Moodle_in_education</p>
6	Slack	<p>Slack is a channel-based messaging valuable platform used in higher education. it is integrated with the tools that students and faculty already know how to use, from video conferencing and file sharing to learning management systems and more.</p>	<p>https://slack.com/intl/en-ng/resources/using-slack/your-guide-to-slack-for-higher-education</p>
7	Zoom	<p>Zoom for Education helps schools and universities address educator concerns and improve student outcomes with secure video communication services.</p> <p>Zoom offers many valuable tools to support teaching and learning, such as screen sharing, recording features and a range of annotation tools. Screen sharing allows teachers to share digital material (including video and audio) with their students. Recording lessons will enable learners to revisit the content at any time and at their own pace. The annotation tools allow teachers to engage with their teaching and learning materials by drawing, writing and highlighting anything on the screen. This helps to make the learning both accessible and visually appealing.</p>	<p>https://thedigitalteacher.com/reviews/zoom</p>
8	Zoho meeting	<p>Build a digital campus for your high school or University, deliver online classes for your students, and create a more collaborative learning experience for everyone.</p>	<p>https://www.zoho.com/showtime/education.html</p>

			https://www.zoho.com/creator/apps/education-management.html
9	Google classroom	The educational tool proposed by the software giant is more than a decent solution for schools, which suddenly had to switch to online learning. It offers a fully functional free tier, which allows for conducting distant teaching. Google Classroom uses well-known G Suite tools, such as Google Docs, calculations' sheets, online presentation tools and video call tools (Google Hangouts).	https://classroom.google.com/
10	Blackboard Learn	BlackBoard learn is aimed at higher-education teachers and students who need to store and share the materials in the cloud. Apart from teaching, it can be used for corporate and governmental training programs. It's mobile-friendly, which caters to the younger users' habits, as it enables them to attend classes anywhere. Blackboard delivers content without fuss.	https://www.blackboard.com/teaching-learning/learning-management/blackboard-learn

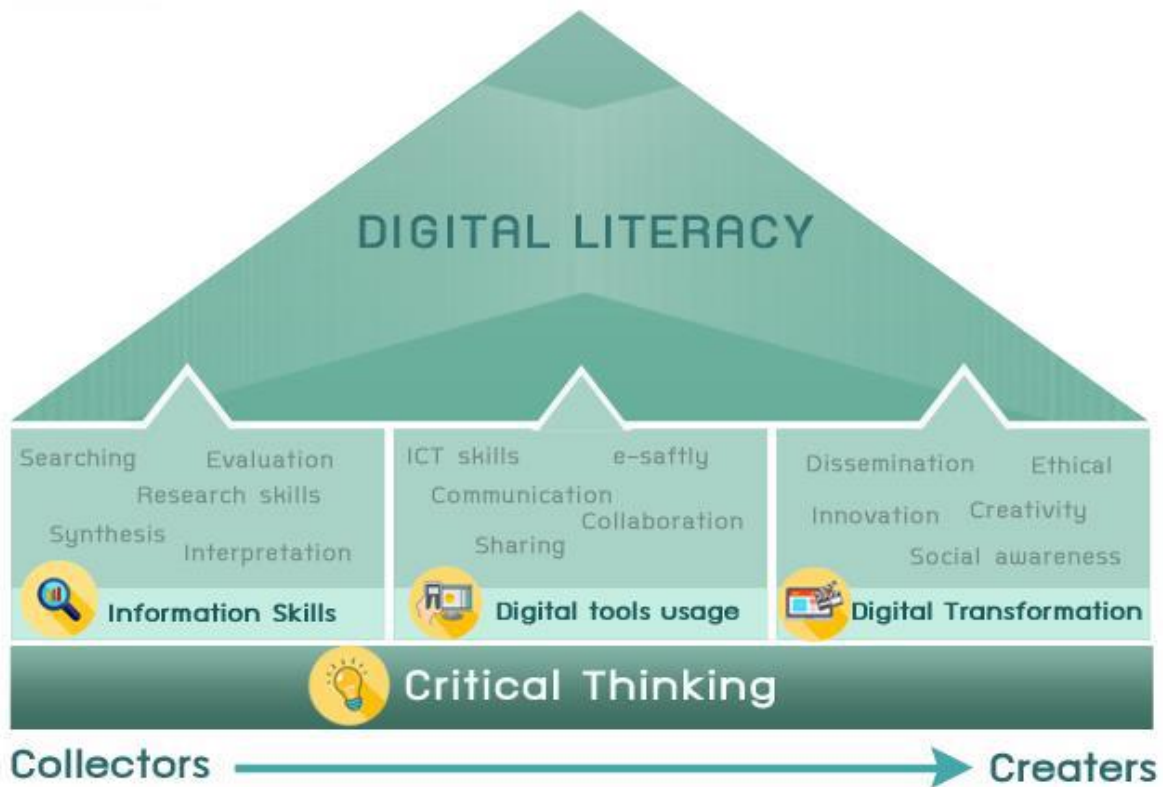
Concept of Digital Literacy

Digital literacy skills are encapsulated in understanding, navigating, and using digital technologies and the Internet. Martin and Grudziecki (2006) viewed digital literacy as the ability to properly use technology as a tool to facilitate information management. Furthermore, they asserted that digital literacy includes creating and presenting new forms of information, solving problems, and applying digital literacy in daily life concerning individual responsibilities and rights for oneself and others.

Digital literacy, therefore, requires critical thinking skills, an awareness of the necessary standards of behaviours expected in online environments and an understanding of the shared social issues created by digital technologies (Promethean, 2015). It is also considered as individual's ability to properly use technology as a tool to facilitate information management, as well as to create and present new forms of information, to solve problems and to apply

digital literacy in daily life concerning individual responsibilities and rights for oneself and others (Martin and Grudziecki, 2006).

Fig. 2: Elements of digital literacy competence for an information specialist. (Siriwatchana K., Jaitip S, and Prachyanun N, 2018)



Digital literacy skills have three skill indicators which are:

- 1) **Information skills:** the fundamental concepts of information management and the techniques and methods related to information management. This category comprises problem definition, issue searches, the methods and strategies for accessing analysis, synthesis, content systematisation, evaluation, interpretation and information application for solving problems or working correctly.
- 2) **Digital tools usage:** the skills and competencies required to learn and use various software applications, digital tools usage for daily life convenience and meeting goals, and ability to

manage and solve fundamental computer problems, communication skills, and ability to manage personal information on networks and the application of technology for co-working and ethics. Digital literacy requires the technical ability to operate digital devices and a variety of cognitive skills to execute tasks in digital environments.

3) **Digital transformation:** the consolidation of information using evaluation skills to generate, improve, designing, producing and presenting new forms of information, creating new knowledge, creatively producing digital innovation by co-learning, reflecting on what could be improved and publishing work while understanding the internet information copyright law.

Consequently, acquiring digital literacy education in higher education means the ability to access various information sources, the practical capacity to use digital tools for information sources management and the ability to generate and share different media, as well as the ability to efficiently present and communicate using the proper processes and tools (Gee, 2012).

In addition, O'Brien and Scharber (2008) indicate that digital literacy is the situation in which a person is encouraged by society to use their skills, capacities and strategies to present and comprehend the concept of various kinds of media, as well as efficiently apply digital tools to their daily life and develop ideas and concepts. Yo, (2021) described digital literacy as digital fluency and digital competencies. He added that digital literacy connotes the availability of knowledge and skills necessary for the safe and effective use of digital technologies and Internet resources by students. This has a significant implication for students.

The Roles of Librarians in Higher Education in the New Normal

Librarians play a significant role in information dissemination. Traditionally, librarians are expected to acquire, store, process, preserve and disseminate information to satisfy the

information needs of their esteemed patrons (Khan, 2016). The objectives of libraries work are based on the IFLA declaration of 2002 cited in Williams and Poh-Sze, (2003) that:

- The library ensures their services respect equity, the general quality of life for all people and the natural environment.
- Library and information services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in various formats, supporting the personal development of all age groups and active participation in society and the decision-making process.
- Library and information services provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for all.
- Library and information services contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights.
- They respect the identity, independent choice, decision-making and privacy of their users without discrimination.
- To this end, library and information services acquire, preserve, and make available to all users without discrimination the widest variety of materials, reflecting society's plurality and cultural diversity and the richness of our environments.
- Library and information services are helping to tackle information inequality demonstrated in the growing information gap and the digital divide. Through their network of services, information on research and innovation is made available to advance sustainable development and the welfare of people worldwide.

Lippincott (2002) advocated for librarians' involvement in learning communities and shifting of focus from explaining library resources to meeting the ongoing information needs of the students in the broad information environment. Therefore, the librarian's role in higher institutions in the new normal is to teach students and staff information literacy skills,

including how to access and locate relevant materials, evaluate and synthesise them for use, and surf the Internet for maximum returns. The new normal offers librarians new roles in helping students to improve information literacy using ICTs facilities and tools. According to Fang and Xuemin (2013) and Mohasin, Shinde and Khaparde (2013), the roles of librarians in a typical digital or E-learning environment are:

- 1) Selection and acquisition or collection of relevant and diverse educational resources in all fields of knowledge and repackaging some for those that are not born-digital in electronic format
- 2) Make these resources easy to access and available over time for students and faculty.
- 3) Librarians are the information intermediaries who can help the users in making use of e-resources.
- 4) Design special online information literacy modules in the E-learning;
- 5) Integrating library information service
- 6) Integrating plagiarism software to assess the reliability of contents and encourage academic morality
- 7) Cataloguing the learning objects and building repositories
- 8) Participate in teaching and learning
- 9) Afford faculty training about the usage of e-learning platform

This shows that librarians are at the centre of the digital learning process in higher institutions and are actively providing online and in-person modules, guides, subject and class-based lists, and reference services (synchronous and asynchronous). Librarians offer classes and courses on research strategies, help students achieve in-depth use of scholarly resources, work with the faculty in planning and developing online courses to integrate information and digital literacy concepts in the curriculum. Academic libraries generally serve faculty through the provision of information regarding teaching, learning and research.

Academic libraries apply appropriate communication technologies to support learning in the digital environment by providing seamless access to electronic resources and services. Electronic resources include online OPAC, databases, multimedia, online journals, digital repositories, electronic books, electronic archives and electronic services. All these provide ongoing digital library support for learners in the higher institution as they provide a bridge between learners, library resources and information providers by selecting and cataloguing resources. They also offer ongoing support enabling learners to interact and exchange knowledge with others, to communicate directly with the publishers and vendors of information resources, and to participate in collaborative learning with the provision of makerspace services.

Conclusion

The future of library services will be more digital than physical as education takes a new direction with the “new normal” tag worldwide. Libraries services and librarians will leverage the learning process and create an avenue for inclusive learning by incorporating digital platforms into education processes. The librarians will serve as key players in the learning process by expanding their roles from information providers to facilitators and educators. Though in Nigeria, the adaption of technology into classroom learning is still at its lowest ebb, there is so much to be done to mitigate the process by including librarians as change agents to secure the success we deserve within a short time. The study, therefore, recommends the inclusion of digital literacy into the school curricula of our higher institutions with clear policies to leverage appropriate learning environments to facilitate the use of technology and libraries’ support in the context of teaching and learning. Also of importance is the promotion of the use of e-learning platforms in every discipline and the upgrading of libraries resources and services in all the higher institutions in Nigeria.

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