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Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa that is geographically and well located on the West African coast. It has a great diversity in the area of its natural components that comprises of varied topography, climatic conditions as well as vegetational patterns. With a population of 140 million people, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa and accounts for 47 percent of West Africa's population (World Bank, 2010). In terms of land mars it covers an area of about 924, 000km and is bordered on the north by the Niger Republic, on the east by Chad and Cameroon, on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, and on the west by the Republic of Benin (Diso, 2005). Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources that spread across its 36 states as well as its Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Nigeria has a number of universities attached with academic libraries. At present there are about eighty nine (89) universities in Nigeria (Lawal, 2007). Also there are a number of polytechnics and colleges all attached with academic libraries. Nigeria's university system is been supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), a parastatal body under the Federal Ministry of Education; while the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) supervises polytechnics and colleges respectively.

Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005). Singh and Kaur (2009) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries along side supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research.

Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many a times academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolved.

Paradigm Shift in Academic Library Services

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the role and position of libraries has dramatically changed. Etim (2004) cited in Okon (2005) observes that the rapid pace of development in the field of information technology and the advent of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the Library and Information Sciences (LIS) profession. The global trend is now characterized with a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases. However, traditional library and information services and functions are still relevant.

Today, the contemporary practice in academic library services in the 21st century is being propelled with an information explosion, and the inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in all aspects of library services. Kumar (2009) notes that academic libraries are changing dramatically by adopting new means of technology in all activities of print to e-environment where a variety of manual method, are replaced by computerized system which provides opportunity for online accessibility.

Libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives (Okiy, 2005)

The present-day academic library services in the 21st century is focusing more on the area of digital, virtual or libraries without borders all of which have transformed academic libraries and led to transition and transformation in the academic library environment. The transition and the transformation are accompanied with sophistication in the changing pattern in the information needs of users which is growing rapidly. Singh and Kaur (2009) observed that there is a paradigm shift from stand alone libraries to library and information networks; from printed publications to digital documents; and from ownership to access. The transition according to them is as a result of the impact of ICTs, the Internet and the web which is affecting all types of libraries.

Developments in ICTs have now offered academic libraries an exciting and challenging opportunities that requires them to respond positively in all facets of their services and functions if they are to remain relevant in the 21st century. Thus, academic libraries must devise means of survival.

Academic Libraries Situation in Nigeria

Academic libraries in Nigeria are at a crossroads. This is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. Nigerian academic libraries derive the greater part of their funds from the government (both Federal and State). Okiy (2005) notes that of all the different types of libraries in Nigeria, only university libraries have a clearly defined policy of funding, because they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institutions. However, it is regrettable that such monies are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision (Okiy, 2005; Yetunde, 2008)

The situation in private universities also tends to portray a gloomy picture as the story seems to be the same. Yetunde (2008) observed that in most private universities in Nigeria the founder and the board of trustees usually determine the share of university library's budget which in most instances is not adequate. This ugly situation affects the efficiency and effectiveness of their functions.

However, despite the not so encourage situation in terms of funding,

recent efforts made in the area of Internet and ICTs in academic libraries in Nigeria has been reported in the literature (Womboh and Abba, 2008; Fatoki, 2005; Etim, 2006; Ani et al, 2005) where academic libraries made series of attempts to adopt the technologies for improved services. Although despite the efforts, very little success has been recorded. A lot still needs to be done.

Providing current awareness services to an ICT driven target academic community requires dynamic, innovative, timely and adequate communication technologies (Fatoki, 2005). However, most academic libraries in Nigeria are severely constrained by a number of factors that includes erratic internet services, lack of hardware and software and in most instances the non-availability of the said ICTs in most academic libraries.

Besides, there is difficulty in the importation of books and journals from abroad due to the high rise in foreign exchange. This has deterred many academic libraries from acquiring current and relevant titles that will support the academic programmes of their parent institutions. Thus the efforts of most academic libraries in providing modern information services is thwarted by the existence of the aforementioned problems whose genesis is that of inadequate funding. Also IT literacy among academic librarians in most libraries is still at the peripheral level. Nok (2006) observed that many staff of university libraries are not computer literate as such they find it difficult to cope with the requirements of the electronic age.

However, the recent establishment of digital libraries in three (3) universities in Nigeria i.e. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (A.B.U.); University of Lagos; and the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) by the MTN Nigeria, which has been reported by IT News (2010) can be considered as a stepping stone towards provision of viable and vibrant academic library services that are desired in the 21st century Nigeria.

The Way Forward

For Nigerian academic libraries to provide the desired information services to their respective communities, that will match the requirements of the 21st century, emphasis should shift towards:

1. Academic libraries should explore more alternative sources of funding as over reliance on the government on monies that are not forthcoming may not provide the desired solutions.
2. New initiatives are required in the form of consultancy services, marketing of information products as well as other income generating services.
3. The need for the committees of university librarians, and their counterparts in polytechnics and colleges to sensitize their respective institution's administrators on the central role of academic libraries in teaching, learning and research activities in academic communities.
4. More emphasis should be placed on the provision of online access and services such as OPAC, e-journals, e-books, and networked information services.
5. Improvement in ICTs such as the Internet, Intranet, hardware and software as well as Internet band with.
6. The need for the Nigerian Library Association to be proactive in the 21st century.
7. Improvement in ICT training for academic librarians
8. Finally, government must realize the central role of academic libraries to national development which requires provision of more funds for academic library development in the country.

Conclusion

Digital revolution has dramatically changed the face of libraries in the 21st century. This posed a challenge to academic libraries to digitize their services and resources through appropriate ICT application in order to remain relevant. However, academic libraries in Nigeria are faced with enormous problems notably that of lack of proper funding. Despite that, they must against all odds try to measure up with their contemporaries elsewhere. Their ability to overcome some of the major challenges undermining their efforts in providing the desired services to their communities in this information age should therefore serve as one of the coping strategy methods for the 21st century academic library service in Nigeria.

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