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Contextualization of the Information Literacy Background in Nigeria Education Sector

By

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Abstract

Information literacy is a concept that has attracted the attention of a considerable number of renowned scholars, governments and international organizations the world over. Regardless of the overwhelming exposure and deliberation surrounding the notion of information literacy, it is important to note that it is an evolving and developing concept that is applicable to all human endeavors. This paper illuminates the context of the research location which is Nigeria. A relative analysis was carried out with the intention of bringing out the status, trends, challenges and opportunities in information literacy and how it will strengthen the education system in Nigeria. The article embarked on vibrant narrative of the contextual setting by concentrating on the concept of information literacy as it influences teachings and learning in Nigeria; The status of information literacy revealing the extent, condition and present situation in Nigeria was enumerated; The trend of information literacy presenting what is in practice in information management and other significant issues in information literacy skill in Nigeria were highlighted; Challenges allied to information literacy in Nigeria were presented and different opportunities that were abound in information literacy in Nigeria were discussed with the aim of bring out whatever is novel, by cataloguing gaps and options in available for teachers in pursue of information literacy skill to better their career in Nigeria.

Keyword: Information literacy, contextualization, education sectors, teachers, ICT4D

1 Introduction

Information helps to reduced doubt and ambiguity and it plays an essential role in the quality of education because it's a medium for which knowledge is communicated and a vehicle for the discovery of reality and crystallisation of ideas. Consequently, accessing the right quality

of information requires the knowledge of information literacy. In the opinion of Idiodi (2005:8) perception of information literacy skills and the challenges of information literacy acquisition in developing countries are similar to those in some other countries. It is important for teachers and students to find and efficiently use information in whatever format regardless of the location. If this is the case, teachers and students must be taught how knowledge is structured and organized by librarians who are experts in information organization and retrieval and in the best position to guide others. However, librarians cannot do it alone; they need to collaborate with other members of staff who have the responsibility to integrate information usage into their teaching programmes and encourage students to use the resources available, both in the libraries and other well regulated information sites.

Modern teaching requires the ability to find, evaluate, organize and communicate information, and the awareness that information is in a state of continuous flux, which means it changes as quickly as it is available. Teachers, in the analysis of Solomon, Wilson and Taylor (2012:4), are expected to continuously expand their body of knowledge to become successfully up to date, and this ability requires the skill of information literacy.

Information literacy is vital to learners who are desirous of taking full advantage of information resources that is abundant in the 21st century, it promote problem solving abilities and support critical thinking skills, by logically asking right questions and diligently seeking answers, finding accurate information, forming rational opinions, evaluating sources and making decisions that will nurture willing learners, effective contributors, confident individuals and responsible citizens (Scottish Information Literacy Project, 2013). In view of the above, the purpose of this article is to highlight various aspect of the educational setting in Nigeria that promotes information access of teachers.

2 Nigeria Context

Education in Nigeria has gone through a series of policy transformations over a long period of time. The commitment to institute national policies and guidelines for harmonized standards of education in Nigeria generally rests with the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education. This is clearly stated in the National Policy on Education, and supported by the Education Decree No. 16 of 1985 and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Consequently, the attention of the Federal Ministry of Education is centred on six spheres of education, namely: Early Childhood Education, Introduction Basic

Education, Secondary Education, Tertiary Education, Adult and Non-formal Education, and Special Needs Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009).

According to the *Nigerian Company Laws and Regulation Handbook*, Vol.1 (2015:7), Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa, and the seventh most populous in the world, with approximately 174 million people. Christian missionaries introduced the Western education system in Nigeria in the mid-nineteenth century; it was more readily accepted in the southern part of the country, particularly in Lagos (Jayeola-Omoyeni & Omoyeni, 2014:269). Nigeria's literacy rate is estimated at 73.6% for urban areas and 49.5% for rural areas (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2010: 20

According to Amaghionyeodiwe and Osinubi (2006:2), education being a mechanism of change and transformation, in Nigeria education policy has evolved in the course of numerous of historical developments a policy for educational improvement was launched in 1977 geared towards bringing self-realization, personal and corporate efficiency and effectiveness, national harmony, etc. for the sake of communal, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological advancement. A universal basic education scheme was initiated in 1999 with the aspiration of obliterating illiteracy by the year 2010, and increasing the adult literacy rate. Regardless of this vision, a high level of illiteracy remains endemic in some parts of the country.

In the opinion of Odiya and Omofonmwan (2007:1), education is regarded as the bedrock of development in Nigeria, but regrettably this sector is bedevilled by various challenges, which include insufficient financial support reflected in poor educational facilities, deficient classrooms, outmoded teaching aids (projectors, computers, laboratories and libraries), shortage of quality and well-motivated teachers, and poor and unhygienic learning environments. In addition to these shortfalls, the school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption.

In the assessment of USAID (2012), a body set up to uphold development and democratic practices, the quality of basic education in Nigeria is very poor, and is mirrored in the low academic performance of students. Of the 30 million school-age pupils, barely 23 million are enrolled in schools. Of the registered students only a small number will go on to secondary school. For that reason, Nigeria has a large population of out of school students who will grow to maturity with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, and thus be deprived of opportunity to join the official workforce. This problem is heightened in Northern Nigeria.

3. *Status of Information access and use*

The rationale of the discussion on the status of information literacy is to provide evidence-based data and information to foster a better understanding of subject matter in the context of the Nigerian environment. In recognition of the importance of information as a basis for national survival and development, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2010:59) formulated an information technology policy, although the policy is still only at the draft level. When the policy becomes fully functional it will map out strategy to ensure skilled human resources, transparent government, and attention to other crucial issues of capacity building and creating a reliable infrastructural support base; and it will enable means of assessing, planning and managing development and achieving sustainable growth.

Awareness of the crucial importance of developing information literacy in Nigeria came with the advent of the African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL), a non-profit organization based in Nigeria. According to the Doha Centre for Media Freedom (2013:28), this organization started as a result of the first Africa Media Literacy Conference at Abuja in July 2008, with the sole purpose of promoting the knowledge of media and information to empower Africans in the effective use of information media and ICT tools. The Doha Centre for Media Freedom (2013:28) stresses that the organization is expected to focus on media and ICT education for students and teachers by providing training and a manual that will help learners to cope with the challenges of the information age relating to classroom activities. AFRICMIL's first National Youth Media Forum was held under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development in Nigeria.

UNESCO (2013:238) reveals that information for all its literacy programmes are of immense benefit to the education sector through the school library resources and services in Nigeria, and all developing countries. Regrettably, many schools do not have a library, library resources and the practical proficiency to manage contemporary facilities. To ameliorate these problems, a three-phase strategic plan was put in place for ten schools.

Nigerian education is lagging far behind as a result of its inability to embrace modern technology, especially in many secondary schools across the country. This view is supported by Arenyeka (2012), who states that many schools in Nigeria lack up to date computer technology, and many schools that can boast of having it are severely handicapped by the epileptic supply of electricity. This is a major setback because illiteracy today means more than not being able to read and write. Arenyeka (2012) concurs with the view that when a

teacher lacks computer knowledge or access to modern facilities, he or she can be classified as illiterate. The problem is amplified by the fact that many computer teachers realize their marketability, especially in corporate organizations where higher wages are paid than in the classroom. The only way out of this dilemma is for policymakers to create better working conditions that will attract highly skilled teachers.

Mobile telecommunication presently covers 60% of the national territory, but mobile telephone companies generally power their base stations with generators since the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) is unable to supply electricity. This practice is widespread all over the country, and constitutes the restricted access to effective countrywide operation of ICT in education (Agyeman, 2007:2).

Agyeman (2007:6) observes that another plan to improve the use of ICTs in schools has led to the establishment of SchoolNet in Nigeria as a non-profit organization established to support the use of ICT in Nigerian secondary schools with the backing of government ministries. Agyeman (2007:6) points out that SchoolNet is a public sector project aimed at mobilizing Nigeria's human and financial resources with the intention of using ICTs in education. SchoolNet Nigeria has, in collaboration with the mobile phone operator MTN, ISPs and computer companies, established ICT laboratories/cyber cafés for schools.

The Internet has been paraded worldwide as having enormous power to enable educational change and reform. When used properly it has the potential to expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, and raise educational quality by transforming teaching and learning into an engaging, dynamic process connected to true life. The major obstacle to Internet use is the absence of Internet infrastructure in the rural communities in Nigeria where many students live. The authorities' failure so far to meet these students' need to be connected to the Internet poses a great threat to their studies and the use of ICT in Nigeria (Osang, 2012:1).

2.3.1.1 Policy framework

The Federation of Nigeria's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (2011) is designed to ensure that citizens have unrestricted access to and protection concerning public records and information to the degree that they will not jeopardize public interest, and will protect individual privacy and public officers from the possibly unpleasant repercussions of unveiling certain kinds of official information without approval, and establish procedures for getting the required information.

The accessibility of appropriate and correct information from genuine sources can foster national development. Freedom of information is essential in order to salvage Nigeria and move speedily towards economic and social transformation. The FOI Act creates the opportunity for transparency and honesty in information access which will reinforce democratic structures and add value to democratic practices. Even though the Act was adjudged to be noble, the major challenge is in the implementation. Over the years the Nigerian government has acquired the reputation for making good policies that will ultimately not be of benefit to the people (Anyanwu, Akanwa & Ossai-Onah, 2013). Based on the evaluation of the Federal Government of Nigeria as presented by the ministerial committee on ICT harmonization (2012:8), it was concluded that before 1999 development in the ICT sector was pedestrian for a country big in both size and resources like Nigeria. For instance, telephone lines were fewer than 400 000. However, the ICT status has now changed significantly because of the advent of mobile phones that have surged to 90.5 million, Internet users, who were fewer than 200 000, have also increased to 23.48 per 100 persons. Broadband penetration was 6.1% as at 2010, and PC penetration has grown to 4.7 per 100 persons. This has significantly increased access to information.

The Library Registered Council of Nigeria (LRCN) (2014) was a body established by Act 12 of 1995 of the Federal Government of Nigeria as a parastatal under the Ministry of Education with the aim of deciding who a librarian as an information expert is; resolving the level of knowledge and skill expected to become a librarian and work as an information professional; setting basic standards for all libraries in meeting the information need of the people; and maintaining strategic regulations within the library and information science professions.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2012:9) has put in place several related policies and laws channelled towards the growth of the ICT sector and exploiting the enormous potential for national improvement. Nevertheless, Nigeria, like many other countries, is confronting the unavoidability of the technical, content, economic, institutional and regulatory convergence in the digital era of the comprehensive ICT industry. It is important for Nigeria to evolve new ICT policy frameworks to accommodate convergence and maximize the potential of ICT for national development. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2012:9) in the National ICT Policy intends to create a structure that will improve the capability of the ICT sector to boost the socio-economic advancement which is a key factor in Nigeria's ambition of becoming one of the twenty major economies in the world by the year 2020. The

policy strategy will help in formulating actionable plans, subsectoral procedure and definite implementation strategies.

2.3.1.2 Human resource development

The competence of the teaching profession is revealed in the ability to use knowledge the environment can offer. This refers to the readiness to take advantage of modern facilities and equipment at its disposal. The Nigerian education sector represents a key segment of the labour market with a total employment capacity of 1 987 742 in 2010. An increase of 3.9% took its 2011 total to 2 065 225, and by 2012 it had reached a total of 2 227 784 employees, showing an average growth rate of 6.97% within the period (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The employment demographic shows that female teachers are the largest in the group with 56.59%, 56.26% and 54.70% for 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively. The ratio shows that male teachers were 0.75, 0.70 and 0.73 to one female in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The average growth rate of Nigerian female employees in Nigeria within the period was 8.46% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria (2011:53) is conscious of the reality that the teachers' education module is distinguished by poor training at different educational stages. According to this document, most of the time in Nigeria, teachers generally teach using outdated theory-based curriculum and inadequate instructional methods and materials. Information communication technology (ICT) and engaging diverse learners in different classroom situations are rare, and where it does place it is in a very elementary style. Another situation that has aggravated all the issues raised above in the document is the poor quality of the students in teachers' institutes, most of which take to teacher education as a last option and will readily abandon it as soon as better opportunities are available. The public is consequently faced with a large number of teachers unable to manage the classroom of the 21st century. This state of affairs is not only adverse to growth and development; it is also counterproductive.

The significance of the relationship between education and development in any society cannot be overlooked. In view of this reality the global community and governments all over the world have been determined to empower citizens with good quality education. Regardless of this truth, the education system in Nigeria has experienced several years of neglect, especially in the areas of functional framework that will improve the education sector. The implementation of millennium development goals (MDGs), in the opinion of Okeshola

(2012:201), is hampered by corruption, gross ineptitude, financial squandering and duplication of projects by the federal government.

2.3.1.3 Finance

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2015), the Nigerian education sector is confronting several challenges, which include acute shortages of manpower, especially in the critical areas of science and technology. In addition, there are human capacity gaps, which are the consequence of the poor quality of education and lack of investment sufficient to keep up with the growing school age population in Nigeria. For instance, in the 2012 financial year a total of N400 150 million, i.e. 8.43% of the Nigerian budget, was allocated to education, of which N345 090 001 million, about 82%, was allocated to recurrent expenditure, whilst only N55 056 million, that is 18%, was for capital expenditure.

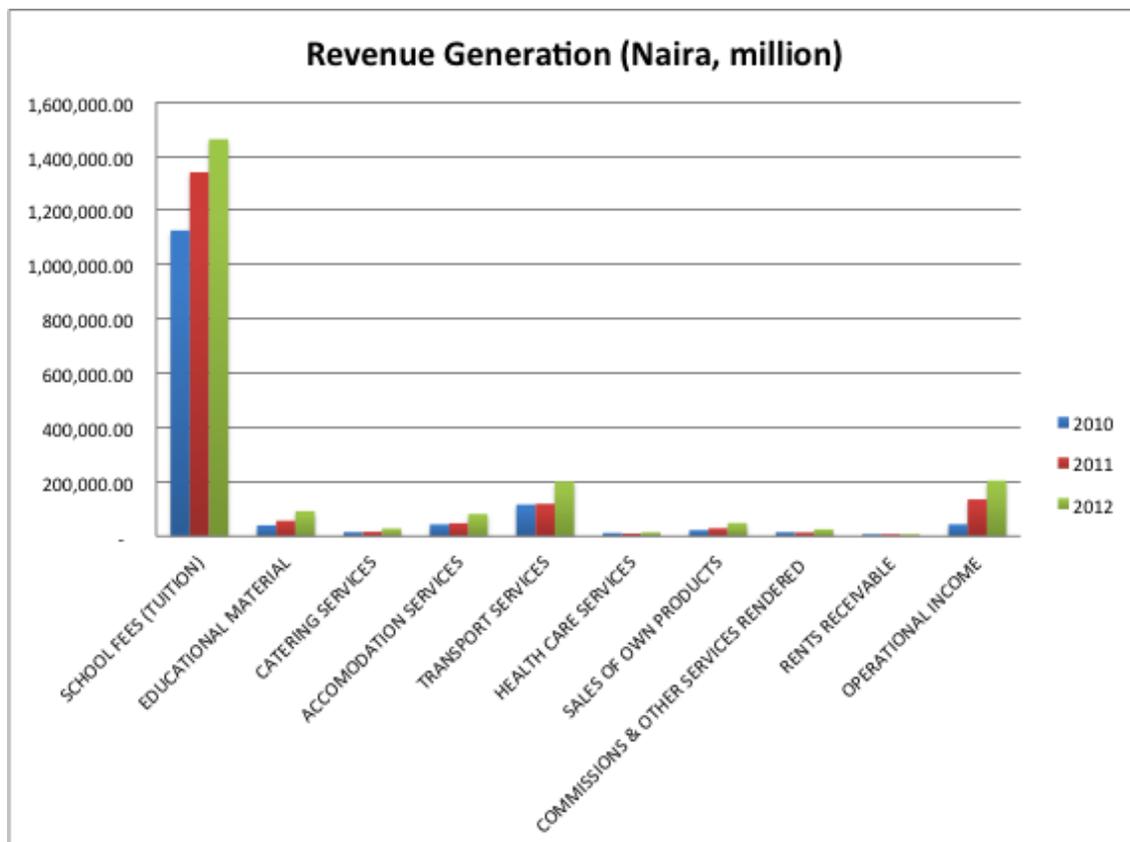


Figure 2:2 Revenue Generations in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015)

2.3.14 Facilities and equipment

According to Abdulkareem and Fasasi (2008:5), the successful implementation of an academic programme calls for adequate facilities, and the collective effort of parents, school proprietors, government, and all other stakeholders. Regardless of these obvious facts, this

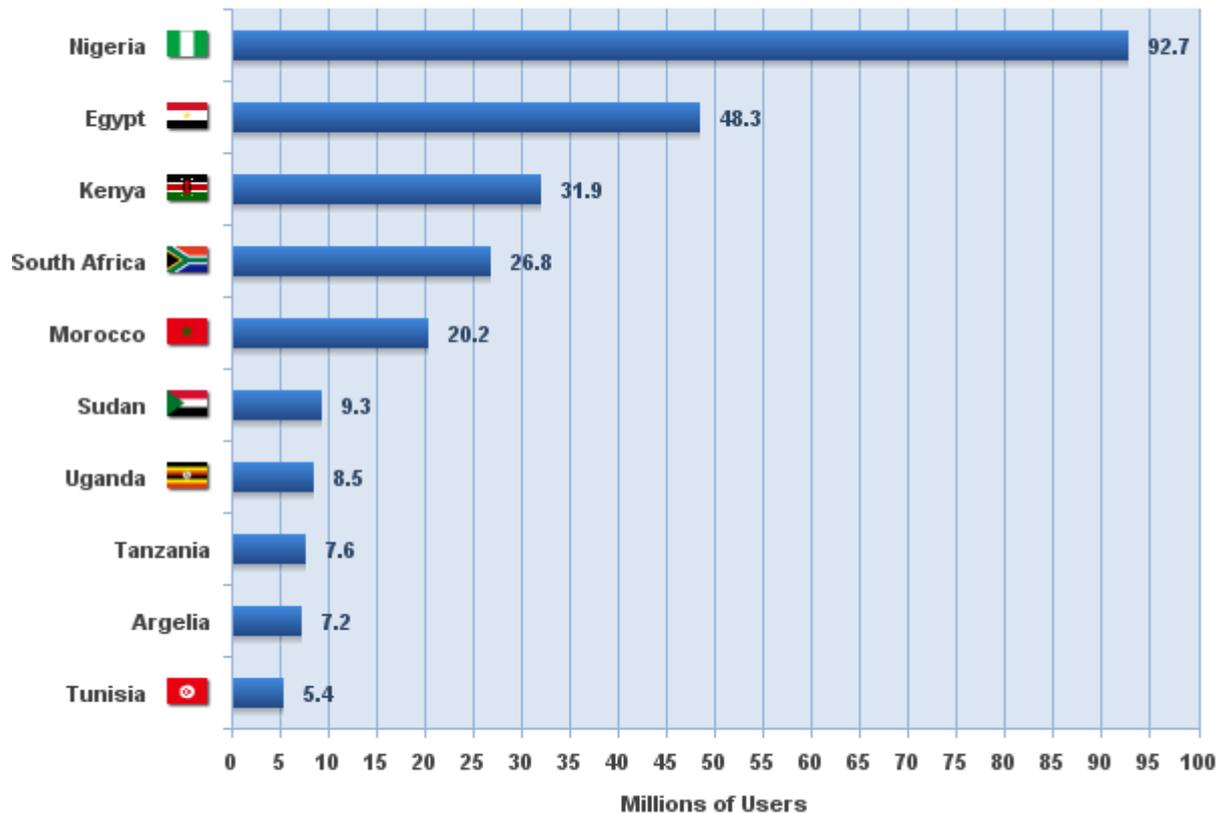
absolute necessity is neglected, and a disparity persists between the provision of facilities in urban and rural schools

Evidence abounds that if efforts are channelled in the right direction, ICT can support teaching and learning appropriately. However, in the opinion of Hennessy, Harrison, London (and) Wamakote (2010:40), introducing the tools and techniques of ICT does not automatically improve the quality of education. Thus the pedagogical and technical proficiency of the teacher is absolutely critical. As in most countries of the world, efforts of government have been focused on teachers' development as the key to the effective implementation of policy and curricula development, and using ICT as a platform for educational development. The current predicament in Nigeria is the result of growing poverty, the lack of proper funding, and the exponential rise in the student population.

The use of the Internet in education has always enabled greater efficiency and productivity, and led to advanced educational outcomes. In the opinion of Adeosun (2010:193), the Internet has a direct bearing on the quality of cognitive ability to boost personal capabilities, and increase creative and innovative thinking in line with the worldwide goal of Education for All, to which the government of Nigeria is a signatory.

Nigeria is leading in Africa in terms of Internet penetration. This is based on the report of the latest Internet World Statistics figures on connectivity rates in Africa as published by the *IT and Telecom Digest* (2013:1). According to the report, Nigeria has 45 million Internet users, and South Africa ranked fifth in the continent with 6.8 million people with access to the Internet. South Africa's low Internet connectivity rate is based on the country's smaller population of 50 million, whereas the population of Nigeria is 174 million. The report states that reduced international connectivity costs in Africa and the increase in the use of Smartphone and ordinary phones that allow web browsing and data applications are two key factors that have driven up Internet usage in Africa. Regardless of the increase in Internet penetration in Africa, the continent is still lagging far behind other continents in the world.

Africa Top 10 Internet Countries November 2015



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm
 330,965,359 Internet Users in Africa estimated for November 30, 2015
 Copyright © 2015, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Figure 2:3 Internet Penetrations in Africa

2.4 Issues about information access and use

Danbatta (2018) revealed the enormous growth of internet penetration in Nigeria with the increase in number of users to 103 million as at May 2018. The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) is envisioned as a 10-year (2006-2015) strategic plan through which national governments and UN agencies collectively hasten literacy efforts in 35 countries (including Nigeria) where illiteracy has become an endemic problem. As a major effective apparatus for the performance of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012), this organization's ambition is to sustain countries in attaining at least 50% improvement in literacy rates by 2015. This is a process in support of literacy which is country-led and country-specific, and embedded in national policies and strategies with technical support offered in the area of policy advocacy, partnerships, capacity building and innovation. LIFE takes into cognizance the implementation procedures and implication of these activities as

well as the lessons learned from the applications within the LIFE framework (UNESCO, 2009:2). The launch of LIFE has offered a gleam of hope for the expansion of a strategic agenda for literacy education in Nigeria. A national stakeholders' forum on LIFE was held at the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Board Room, Abuja, on Friday, 17 March 2006, to launch the LIFE initiative in Nigeria. This meeting was attended by all the critical stakeholders in education in Nigeria, and the international development partners represented by UNESCO. In 2007, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in partnership with policymakers and literacy practitioners from all over the world, combined to see how lessons could be drawn from the past and how literacy could be transformed into a national priority (UNESCO, 2009:2).

According to the National University Commission (2014), there are 142 Federal Government-owned (41), State-owned (40) and privately owned (61) universities in Nigeria, of which very few have library schools. Information literacy has not been given pride of place in the higher education curriculum (Ojedokun, 2005:17). In Nigeria, for instance, the National Universities Commission (NUC) makes it mandatory for all universities in Nigeria to integrate a library literacy course in their curriculum (Noah, 2004). But contrary to the decision of the NUC, only a few universities have embraced the idea. Others have library orientation, some universities have merged it with other general studies courses, and even in the few universities that comply, the course is not offered as a credit-earning course, and so it will not achieve a desirable outcome. In some universities it is considered an elective course; consequently, the content of the course will be insufficient (Rasaki, 2008:1)

2.5 Challenges and Opportunity of Information access and use

Abubakar and Isyaku (2012) attributed the high rate of unemployability of many students in Nigeria to lack of required skills to cope with modern working environments pervaded by an overabundance of information available in many formats. Therefore, information literacy has become an essential requirement to enable participation in modern development and acquiring this knowledge can give a competitive advantage to students and teachers. Lack of information literacy is an indication of a deep lacuna created by the educational system in Nigeria. Onwubiko and Asogwa (2011) state that if graduates lack the requisite knowledge to locate and evaluate information, it means they have been deprived of the skill to enhance their survival in the modern workplace. The problem confronting many universities in Nigeria is their inability to incorporate the skills and knowledge that will enable a student to live a satisfying and productive life in a world overwhelmed with information.

Despite the efforts of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria to boost the ICT education programme, which is one of the pivotal points for information literacy in response to the global trend, many hindrances have plagued the development. According to Ololube, Eke, Uzorka, Ekpenyong and Nte (2009), they include inadequate infrastructure as a result of the lack of a reliable electricity supply to power the ICT tools and materials; the lack of instructional technology that can enhance quality education; and the lack of a broad-based telecommunications network that can advance connection to the Internet. These problems result from the chronically insufficient funding of education in Nigeria. Without all these basic amenities the dream of bridging the digital divide may be unattainable.

In the National Policy of Education put together by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), ICT application is seen as prominent to educational development in contemporary society, in agreement to this policy, it is the responsibility of government to make facilities and required training available to teachers to enable ICT integration with to classroom activities. The use of computer and ICT literacy has gain prominence in Nigeria, this is because of the realization of the tools to enhance teachers' productivity and enhance job security (Adoni & Kpangban, 2010).

2.5.1 Cost: The ability to use, manoeuvre and manipulate the Internet is vital to information literacy. A limitless amount of information is available on the Internet, which can open vistas of opportunities and competitive advantage to the users. To enhance access to the Internet it is important for government and private organizations to collaborate to build a formidable nationwide infrastructural backbone capable of supporting seamless access. In Nigeria access to the Internet is determined by location: those in the rural areas experience difficulty accessing it. Notwithstanding the leading Internet penetration status of Nigeria among other African countries, the number of those who enjoy readily available access to the Internet is negligible compared to the size of the Nigerian population, so the cost of getting Internet access is high (Bambi, 2010).

The cost of computer hardware and software is exorbitant and skyrocketing in Nigeria, and often beyond the reach of most civil servants, especially teachers. Apart from computer resources, in the opinion of Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005:108), many of the secondary schools are also deficient in the use of equipment like printers, scanners, television and other information resources, especially books and journals. Other avenues to access information, like the Internet, are also very expensive and out of reach of many schools.

2.5.2 Speed and time-consuming Internet: Of the population of 10 million estimated Internet users in Nigeria, broadband users are few. High-speed broadband requires fibre-optic cables (Bambi, 2010); but the situation may soon enjoy a dramatic boost as a result of the 14 000 kilometre fibre-optic submarine cable, otherwise known as the West Africa Cable System. This innovation is due to the efforts of financial institutions and telecommunication companies. When it becomes operational it will help timely access to information (*Nigerian Guardian*, 2013). In the meantime, the average speed of the Internet in Nigeria is 4.90 mbps (*Net Index*, 2013).

2.5.3 Deficiencies in ICT infrastructure: The development of ICT infrastructure that is sufficient to support available information resources is not widespread in Nigeria, owing to the inefficiency of the mobile market. The consequence of this has been a digital divide created in Nigeria between urban and rural areas, despite the fact that Nigeria has the most competitive mobile market in Africa; but with expensive operational licences granted to the market operators, mobiles became too expensive for the average citizen (Foster & Pushak, 2011:34).

2.5.4 Weak infrastructure: In Nigeria, a major obstacle to the use of ICT is the dearth of infrastructure. Computer facilities are not designed to function without electricity. According to Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005:108), Nigeria is currently suffering from insufficient power supply except, perhaps, in areas where top government officials live. As a result, expensive educational instructional equipment has been damaged by upsurges in voltage after blackouts. UPS (uninterrupted power supply) is only designed as a temporary alternative energy supply, and is too expensive for many schools.

2.5.5 Pervasive power outages: Electricity is the platform on which modern technology operates. The perennial shortage of power in Nigeria is a major setback to information accessibility and educational development. This is a significant hindrance in the operation of ISPs (Internet service providers) and cyber cafés in Nigeria, who daily rely on power generators and other alternative sources of energy to function. This is further complicated by the constant fuel price increases that have hampered the distribution of the Internet to offices, educational institutions and homes (Bambi, 2010).

The Private School Blog of Nigeria (2011) itemizes various challenges facing library development in Nigeria, including a deficiency in the legislative structure, a shortage of

funds, poor accommodation, unavailability of trained staff, lack of relevant material, and the lethargy of school administrators and the government.

Conclusion

This study carefully examines the information literacy environment in context of Nigerian education sector. The article disclosed how some university libraries incorporate different information literacy activities like library orientations programmes, database searching skills, bibliographic training and the use of the library into school curriculum. The research identified certain factors such as lack of required interest by students, teachers and management, insufficient human capital in handling information literacy training, deficient facilities, and low acceptance of online IL delivery approach and absence of IL policy as major militating factors against the efforts of the libraries to promote information literacy competence. Nigeria as a developing nation also formulate information technology policy to be able to participate effectively in emerging information age focused activities without hindrance and to have positive impact on education, wealth creation, poverty eradication, job creation and to attain global competitiveness. Nigeria just like many nations of the world put together freedom of information bill to enhance freedom of expression which incorporate freedom to seek and receive information from without boundary either orally or in print.

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