Information Service Provision by Librarians in the Era of Globalization

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Introduction

Information technology has transformed the whole world into a global village with a global economy, which is increasingly dependent on the creative management and distribution of information. Over the past decades the world has been experiencing significant changes in which the need to acquire, utilize and share knowledge has become increasingly essential. In the 21st century, the age of knowledge and information is in its higher gear. This is an age when invisible knowledge and information takes the role of prime movers in all sectors. The World Bank has used the metaphor “knowledge is development” to describe globalization. Lack of knowledge is largely responsible for under development. In a knowledge and information-oriented society, creative brains become leaders of economy and knowledge workers are in great demand. If knowledge can be equated with development, then the wider the knowledge gap, the broader the development gap.

A phenomenal change through close interaction and integration of cultures is rapidly impacting on the entire world. This change branded globalization is propelled by information and communication technology (ICT). Economic Commission for African (2000) remarked that globalization refers to changes occurring at a global level, which in several ways have not been in the control of individual nation states and their governments. Globalization is the integration of national economies, culture, social life, technology, education and politics. It is the movement of peoples, ideas and technology from place to place (Yau, 2005). Emeagwali (2004), traced the genesis of globalization in Africa to the period of slave trade which resulted to colonization and Christian Missionary activities in Africa. Generally, two contrasting paradigms ignite the debate on globalization as a form of integration and as a form of imperialism. Western scholars such as Chang (2008) propagate the former while scholars from Africa and other developing countries such as Mojah (2004) and Chang (2008) have the later perspective. They argue that globalization is a metaphor for imperialism since there are several inequalities in the globalization process to the detriment of the developing countries. A pertinent issue however, is that globalization like several other changes cannot be wished away. This is because the new information revolution which Omekwu (2001) believes has come to replace the agrarian and industrial revolution is rapidly compressing the world into digital global village. The revolution has led to a social process which involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in time taken either physically or by representation to cross them, so making the world smaller and in a certain sense bringing human beings closer to one another (Yau, 2005). Information revolution, powered by
information and communication technology (ICT), has given impetus to a new information economy. Information and knowledge have become a very critical factor of production just like land and capital during agrarian and industrial revolution. This revolution is tremendously impacting in all aspects of human life particularly in critical areas like education. This has been recognized by Mojah (2004) who argues that the global restricting of the economy has had major impact on higher education. He however regrets that people who benefit from global economy tend to enjoy better developed system of higher education since educational resources emanating from the global information environment are more sophisticated in developed economies than in developing economies. The librarians being information resources managers are critically positioned in this new information revolution to enhance information availability and use in higher education in the country. The focus of this paper therefore, is to find out how globalization and the new information revolution has influenced library and information centres in Nigeria and the challenging roles of librarians in the new information environment.

**Purpose of paper**

In the present ever changing information environment, libraries are encountering both opportunities and challenges. Information technology has introduced many changes in the way information is identified, procured, processed and disseminated to library clientele. Libraries and information centers are witnessing new paradigm shifts. These shifts include:

- Transition of information sources and systems from paper to electronic media.
- Complexity in information needs of highly demanding clientele.
- Increase in the cost and quality of information.

Being that library clientele are of diverse population and they clamour for the currency of information. This paper therefore seeks to find out how Nigerian Information professionals are fairing in this era of globalization, the prospects available to them as well as the threats.

**Structure of the paper**

The first section of the paper will discuss an overview of what information service provision and globalization are all about. This will be followed by the concept and practice of globalization. Thereafter globalization in university libraries will be discussed which will be connected to Nigerian Libraries. The paper will further discuss the challenges of the libraries and then conclusion and recommendation will be given.
Information Service Provision

Presently, librarians are playing an integrated role beyond their traditional job. In a fast changing world there are new demands and influences on libraries and information centers. By using modern technologies all over the world libraries are now shifting their emphasis from traditional to multidimensional work force. Therefore, LIS professionals have to play versatile role in different areas of libraries and information centers to meet the expectations and needs of the present situation.

Information service provision is a critical factor which is reshaping the world at large. Corgburn and Adeye (1999) have noted that the driving force behind the current information provision is the new technologies that go with information and communications technology (ICT). These technologies continue to provide enabling environment for global education process in which geographical regions are benefiting one way or the other from the vast opportunities in the global education industry where most libraries are situated (Geleijnse, 1994). However, for information provision to be made possible Emeagwali (2004) and Yau (2005) posit that critical infrastructures must be in place. These infrastructures include computers and internet connectivity, sustainable power supply, human capacity development and the political will by the government. Peraton and Greed (2000) has identified a numbers of opportunities that the new information environment can provide for scholars and students. These include unlimited access to data bases scattered around the globe through the internet. According to Ite (2004), contact, collaboration and communication have provided veritable environment for linkage programmes between and among University. This has definitely added value to the provision of information globally.

Globalization

Globalization is a phenomenon that is multi-dimensional and multifaceted. It has economic, political, socio-cultural and educational implications (Robertson, 1992; Obilade, 2000). It is the transformation of domestic matter to a matter of international concern. Yau (2005) argues that globalization is all about greater interaction among countries and people. He however fears that this integration is dangerous in many ways because of disparities existing between developed and developing countries particularly as it concerns information and communication technologies, the engine that powers globalization. In line with this, Chang (2008) fears that globalization is a sugar-coated bitter pill which has reduced developing countries to mere appendage of Western super powers. Undoubtedly, globalization has deep economic
dimensions; conquest, dominations and trade. The underlying principles of globalization are integration, liberalization and privatization (Cogburn and Adeya, 1999) which have impacted on government policies particularly as it concerns higher education. Therefore, Gilbert (2007) has reasoned that these developments mean an uncontrollable process of globalization in education system and can at the same time offer new perspectives to solving educational problems. Education is now more concerned with critical thinking and self directed learning opportunities which will serve the individual over a life time. As a result of this Cleveland (1999) remarked that Nigeria needs world-class higher institutions, bearing in mind that internationally competitive educational system is the first step in building an economy that generates that dividend of globalization.

**Concept and practice of globalization**

The concept of “globalization” is currently a fashionable term used in the social sciences, amongst management experts, journalist and politicians. There is a growing notion that today we live in a period where much of social life is determined by global process (Institute of International Education, 2001). In today’s world no nation would afford to live in island, as such co-operation, collaboration and sharing are the norms of the society. The process of economic development and political leadership involving significant industrialization lead to a new, much more diverse, complex, and interrelated economy, which becomes increasingly difficult for a single country to contend with. The foreign influence and pressure for democratization in many countries also helped to open up such countries to international presence and involvement, and instruments such as political, economic, diplomatic, and military were used by western powers to promote democracy and democratization across the globe. Indeed, by the late 1980s the major sources of power and influence in the world – the Vatican, the United States, the European Community, and the Soviet Union were actively promoting liberalization and democratization (Huntington, 1991).

Globalization, as a present international order, is synonymous to harmonization, unification, free entry and exit, abrogation of trade barriers, common market, give and take, internationalization, common currency, tariff waver, transfer of technology, indigenization, economic integration, inclusiveness etc., as against the old notion of individualism and self-sufficiency. The era of globalization is seen as an end to national cultures, national economies and national borders. Economically, globalization is more than international exchange of goods and services, interaction of separate domestic economies, and extensive reach of capital. It is a unified global economy. For example, the economic liberalization that started during the
1970s, cheaper transports and IT (Information technology) development made globalization processes accelerated (Institute of International Education, 2001). According to Oman (as cited in Institute of International Education, 2001), four phenomena reflected upon the perception of globalization today: (i) the end of U.S. domination of trade and leadership; (ii) the rapid expansion of financial markets world-wide; (iii) the globalization of corporate activity; and (iv) the rise of public concern towards environmental threats. However, the critics of globalization have presently argued on the attainability and reality of the system. One of their points was that large geographical areas and populations are not involved in the processes termed globalization especially third world countries that do not have any economic advantage.

**Globalization of library services**

The expansion and growth in scientific and technical innovations has posed serious challenges to libraries and information centers globally coupled with the exponential growth of research and development (R&D) in the developed nations which recognize information as a vital national resource that determine the direction of any nation. Information is an essential part of a nation’s resources, and access to it, is one of the basic human rights; it is not only a national resource vital for scientific and economic progress but also seen as a medium for social communication (UNESCO, 1978) as cited by Nkiko (2005).

Based on the recognition that libraries generate, organize, store and disseminate information necessary for social, economic, and industrial development, the United States and the British Governments placed premium on libraries as a critical agent for educational and national development. British council as well as the United States Information Service (USIS) established sophisticated and well-stocked libraries across the globe (Adebayo, 1997).

In recent years, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have grown quite rapidly and the practice in the library and information environment is toward inter-accessibility, internetworking, exchange and resource sharing, digitization and virtualization, open access, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), library consortia, information superhighway, etc. All these underscore the transformations brought to bear by ICTs to the library and information environment world-wide which necessitated libraries to open up their frontiers for others as against the old notion of self-sufficiency and restricted or closed access.

For higher education, the new technologies have made access easier, promote equity and improve the quality of education. It is argued that the aim of using technology in library and information centers was to enhance access and flexibility, while reducing costs and promoting quality of services and resources. According to Ndukwe (2005), the digital revolution progressed to usher in the information age with computer networking of today that enables
resources and information sharing even on a world-wide basis. The interconnection of computers and the Internet have brought about greater efficiency and better information sharing and management. In recent years, major developments in ICTs and the rapid growth of global infrastructure and networks such as internet and broadband have transformed businesses and markets and generated significant wealth and economic growth in many countries. This revolution also means that constraints of time and distance have been virtually eliminated. In the present day, capital accumulation has become more knowledge-based and knowledge intensive; those countries, firms, individuals etc. that have access to the most sophisticated knowledge and information are able to compete (Gill, 1996). Available knowledge at individual and collective levels has to be optimally managed, developed, and utilized and this is made possible via information and communication technologies. It is evident that, ICT is driving the new global economy. People, businesses and communities with ready access to information technologies are better equipped to participate actively in the global economy (Ndukwe, 2005).

The use of ICTs in libraries world-wide provides the fastest and most efficient capabilities and flexibilities for acquiring, processing, sorting, storing, retrieving, dissemination, and utilization of information. In the developed world for example, many libraries have access to computer communication such as OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) of the University of Ohio, USA. OCLC avails users to the resources of at least 38,000 libraries across the world using about 75 databases including MARC records with full text access to 7500 journals. This is no doubt a window to the world of information and users can access this gateway from their libraries or remotely from the comfort of their beds, offices, laboratories, classrooms, etc. There are also other databases accessible across the world that linked several libraries such as; MEDLARS, ERIC, AGRIS, AGRICOLA, EBSCOHOST, SABINET, etc.

In African continent, particularly with the help of UNESCO, the World Bank, the Humanities Library Project, and the Net Library, a few educational, governmental, non-governmental, and Research Institutions have been able to establish their own digital collections in their libraries. The most noteworthy and visible among them is the African Digital Library (ADL), (Sharma, 2009). It is a joint venture project of Technikon SA, South Africa; the Association of African Universities and Net Library, a private US based corporation. The mission of ADL is to provide digitized full text resources to learners in Africa via the revitalization of education and lifelong learning on the continent and alleviation of the digital divide between first and third world countries (Sharma, 2009). The ADL opened November 1, 1999 and has over 8,000 titles in over fifty subjects including agriculture, business, computer science, education, engineering,
medicine, religion and technology. ADL serve as a model for resource sharing for many under
developed regions of the world. The availability of Global Information Infrastructure (GII)
ocasioned by advancement in technology had completely revolutionized the information
environment in to a more responsive and dynamic one. It had created information environment
that is complete and fluid, connective and interactive, diverse and unpredictable, where the
professional provision of information is no longer constrained by time and space (Todd, 2000).
The globalization of library and information services was further enhanced with the
proliferation of digital libraries which is described as an organized collection of documented
information resources (text, numeric, images, statistics, sound, software, etc) 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 location
of the user and/or the information resources with the assistance of information and
communication technology. Ya’u (2003) asserts that the virtual library has an opportunity to
address the paucity of teaching and research materials in the libraries of higher institutions in
Nigeria as well as giving room for sharing of research outputs with the global community
amongst the institutions and the local researchers.

**Nigerian Libraries**

The world is changing in the new knowledge economy and in the digital age. Libraries of all
types are also undergoing changes. In this era of knowledge and information explosion, the
unprecedented growth of knowledge and information has impacted all nations, organizations,
libraries and individuals. Based on the fact that knowledge and information handling is done
by way of collecting, processing, and dissemination is the main thrust of any library, the role
of the libraries in this digital age is changing to provide the competitive advantage for their
users. The ICTs are at the forefront of this dynamic and rapidly changing situation through
facilitating integration and synergy between library institutions and practitioners in the
profession.

Nigeria as part of the global system with all potentials (human and material resources) for
socio-economic and technological development is still far cry from reality. Today, Nigeria is
rated as one of the world’s fastest growing telecommunication markets and other ICT facilities
in the world as acknowledged by the International Telecommunication Union in its 2010 ICT
development index report (International Telecommunication Union Report, 2010). According
to the report, the Nigerian IDI value increased by more than 20 percent, jumping up to 12 places
to 122nd in the year 2008. While overall rank is still low, it represents a significant improvement
for such a large country. This improvement is mainly due to an increase in ICT use (23 ranks
up in the sub-index), with the number of internet users increasing from 7 to 100 inhabitants in 2007 to about 16 in 2008. While this is substantially lower than internet penetration levels in advanced countries, it is much higher than the African average of 4 per cent in 2008. Although attempts have been made to integrate Nigeria information environment into global system, such effort always ends at policy formulation stage because the requisite infrastructure to sustain and facilitate the integration is lacking, continued growing digital divide (the gap between “have” and “have not” technology) coupled with problem of technical expertise for designing, development and implementation of the project.

The attempt by Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education at creating National Virtual (Digital) Library to boost the quality of teaching and learning, and enhanced access to national and international library and information resources is still far from actualizing. The objectives of the project include:

- To improve the quality of teaching and research in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria through the provision of current books, journals and other library resources.
- To enhance access to academic resources serving the higher education community in Nigeria to global information resources.
- To enhance scholarship, research and long life learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collection.
- To provide guidance for academic libraries on applying appropriate technologies used in production of digital library resources; and
- To enhance the use and usability of globally distributed, networked information resources (Okebukola, 2002).

**Challenges faced by Nigerian Libraries**

However, in spite of the enormous benefit accruable to the Nigeria library and information environment, libraries in Nigeria failed to fully embrace and harness the potentials of ICT to serve their users or even venture into the sophisticated global information infrastructure. Most academic and research libraries in Nigeria have not computerized any of their functions. The public card catalogue and the visible index are still finding tools for books and journals in most libraries. Likewise, indexes and abstracts are compiled manually. Library and information services in Nigeria have yet to transcended the traditional functions as visualised by (Sharma, 2009). The above situation was largely due to the conglomeration of problems which include the following:
Problem of infrastructural facilities
Lack of computer literacy / education
Lack of support from government, may be owing to budget constraints
Poor maintenance and update culture
Problem of record conversion

Several challenges however, face Nigeria and other developing countries in the new information revolution. A nagging issue is the problem of digital divide existing between developed and developing countries. This is glaring when one considers African’s web visibility. Studies have provided evidences that Africa has the lowest web presence globally (Emeagwali, 1997; Peraton and Creed, 2000; Mutala, 2002; Omekwu, 2003; Yau, 2005). Mutala’s study reveals that Africa’s global web contribution is about 1.08%. Similarly, Peraton and Creed (2000) are worried that more than 80% of global website is from North America and Europe and more than 85% of scientific publications are also from the same area. The poor global web presence in African countries is a serious threat to the development of higher education in Nigeria since it will be difficult for Nigeria to globalize its local educational resources. Owing to this Akanni (2008) believes that a sure way to respond to the challenges of globalization and information revolution is the provision of virtual library services in higher institutions in Nigeria. According to him this can be achieved in two ways:- The first approach is group of libraries pulling their resources together to form a consortium aimed at providing information to library users through the use of resources of member libraries. The second approach is the establishment of e-learning centre that would provide users resources within and outside the country.

Conclusion

There is a paradigm shift in learning process in higher institutions in this millennium. The paradigm shift is that the society and libraries are no longer situated in the physical environment, but on virtual, online, electronic or cyberspace. Globalization and information revolution is increasingly changing the learning process in higher education. Globalization has caused librarians and higher institutions in Nigeria and developing countries to face new type of learning involving the use of ICT infrastructures to improve educational resources. Library Professionals in this environment therefore, have greater roles to play because they are the interface between information and the users in the new revolution. This has changed the needs and uses which readers in higher institutions other users in Nigeria make of library resources and therefore, affects librarian priorities for service delivery. It affects also the tools and system
with which library professionals operate and therefore, impacts on the structures by which library services are delivered. It changes the context and format of the resources which librarians have at their disposal and therefore challenges the approach of library professionals in response to the contemporary situation.

It is obvious and evident that in spite of the transformation recorded in the global information environment where barriers to access and utilization irrespective of the location were removed, Nigerian library and information centers are still operating at individualistic and closed access levels. In Nigeria, many libraries have no e-mail, fax, telephone and computer-based services and this has a great implication for learning, teaching, electricity back-up research and development. This underscores the nonchalant attitude and lip service paid by the Nigerian government and other stakeholders in the business of ICT infrastructure development and implementation. As the world is moving toward globalization of its socio-economic, political and educational activities, ICTs are regarded as enablers and driving force since they are (ICTs) nervous system of the contemporary society, transmitting and distributing sensory and control information and interconnecting a myriad of interdependent units and systems.

**Recommendation**

For Nigerian library and information centers to join the global information superhighway and tap its potentialities through competitiveness, the virtual library project must be taken serious and enhanced because it is a technological way of bringing together the resources of various libraries and information services in one place, so that users can find what they need quickly and easily. A virtual library can consist of materials from a variety of separate libraries that are organized in a virtual space using computer and computer networks. Being that the virtual library is an enhanced access to national and International library and information resources for teaching, learning, research and pleasure via the digital technology thereby making Nigeria a tune and active member of the global village policy. The uniqueness of the virtual library is that it is space less, since it requires the conversion of target library collection in to electronic format and placed on the Internet to be accessed by anybody and anywhere. The content of virtual library may include, but certainly is not limited to, CD-ROM, Internet subscriptions, list of annotated web links, internal work products (such as brief banks), propriety databases (such as Lexis Nexis or Westlaw) and even web spiders or push technology that deliver targeted research to the user. However, particularly, the following technologies need to be integrated in to the information environment:- Computing technology, such as mainframe computers, microcomputers, microchip technology, Artificial Intelligence, Software technology etc. Telecommunication technology; Audio technology, teletext, videotext, telephone, fax (
facsimile transmission), voice mail, motion picture, E-mail, teleconference etc. Broadcasting technology, Broadband and Satellite technologies etc. Microelectronic / micrographic technology; CD – ROM, Hard Disk, Flash technologies etc. Reprographic technology; printers, scanners, photocopiers etc. Finally, professional librarians in this environment should try to embrace these new technologies through retraining, retooling and then adopt new strategies which would improve information services delivery that would meet international best practices.
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