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Assessment of Factors Influencing Information Communication technology (I.C.T) Competency among Library Staff

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the factors influencing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competencies among library staff in university libraries. The objective of the study was to find how competent library staff are in using ICT facilities to do their job. The findings revealed that many library staff in university libraries perform Microsoft Word based tasks like typing and printing of documents, can provide online searches using internet but cannot perform effective professional library related duties using ICT. Staff need ICT competencies in the areas that can assist them handle professional related duties, like internet skills, mastery of library soft wares and technical skills. Library staff acquired ICT training mainly through personal practice, on the job training, seminars, conferences and workshops, but preferred training through library schools. The major problems that hindered ICT competency acquisition among library staff are lack of funding, higher authority not willing to release their staff to go for further training, lack of opportunities, lack of ICT training facilities and inadequate curriculum content for ICT in the library schools. Strategies to improve the ICT competencies of library staff are by provision of more ICT facilities in library schools, development of personal interest by staff to acquire ICT competencies, sponsorship and study grants, study leave to be granted to staff to go for Competency acquisition trainings, also the authority should be willing to release staff for studies and recruit more staff to reduce work load. Suggestions on areas for further studies on ICT competencies of library staff were also made.

Key: ICT, Competency, Library staff,

Introduction

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in performing library functions is becoming very useful in the Universities because it makes service delivery to users faster and more efficient. As noted by Adebisi (2009), in Henderson (1992), ICT in libraries ensure speedy and easy access to information from unlimited sources. ICT provides speedy, accurate and precise information; it also has flexibility of usage by different users. It has transformed library services globally, information are recorded in electronic format. It has contributed immensely to the performance of librarianship in the discharge of their duties such as cataloguing, reference services, circulation services, management, serials control CD-ROM database, online database and web based resources.

With the use of ICT facilities like the World Wide Web, and Internet connectivity, individuals can access information from unlimited sources. It also gives users opportunity to work at their own pace and according to their own needs. The term Information and Communication Technology (ICT) evolved from Information Technology (IT). Whereas Information Technology is used to refer to the latest trend and devices that enhance information processing and usage, ICT on the other hand is used to represent the process or act of exchanging or sharing information using the existing technological facilities such as computer related devices, Barcode machine, Networks, Internet connectivity, electronic mails scanner, printer, CD ROM, facsimile and storage devices. Nwachukwu (2005) defines ICT as a device or tool that allows for the collection, storage, processing or the communication of information. It is a kit or equipment used for capturing, processing, storing and accessing information. (Ekoja, 2007). ICT devices which are used to acquire or impart information or knowledge are seemingly endless. They include calculators, photocopiers, computer related devices, Barcode machine,

Networks, Internet connectivity, electronic mails scanner, printer, CD ROM, facsimile and storage devices. Although ICT devices are many, for this project work, the emphasis is on computer related ICT devices. The benefits of ICT in libraries generally and university libraries in particular are innumerable.

Chisenga (1995) acknowledges that ICT applications improve service delivery in libraries and allied institutions responsible for information provision. Most library functions such as, Acquisition, Cataloguing and Classification, Reference services, previously handled manually are now performed electronically using ICTs. This has helped to reduce time spent on doing the jobs and with fewer mistakes. Nwalo (2000) lists some of the benefits of ICT to libraries as: being able to automate technical services; to provide efficient references and information services; to network operations such as cataloguing, authority control, interlibrary loans and International bibliographic project. These functions become faster and less cumbersome to perform with the help of ICT facilities. Ajayi (2001) describes a library transformed into a new information service unit, providing electronic cataloging, On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), electronic acquisition and serials control, electronic inter-library loan and electronic circulation functions. The University library which has long been recognized as the heart of every academic institution is one place where the benefits of ICT are prodigious. As the center of intellectual activities of the university, it has an important role to play to make sure adequate information materials are provided and that adequate assistance is given by the library staff to ensure that the information needs of the staff, students and researchers of the university are met. Modern ICT facilities such as internet, can enable the university library provide content and information dissemination by means such as electronic thesis and dissertations, which students and researchers can benefit from millions of pages of relevant information on the web.

Edoka (2000) summarized some functions of the university libraries where the application of ICTs is imperative for better accomplishment. They are as follows:

- i. To provide information materials required for the academic programme of the parent institution
- ii. To provide research information resources in consonance with the needs of faculty and research students
- iii. To provide information resources for recreation and for personal self-development of users.
- iv. To cooperate with other libraries at appropriate level for improved information services.
- v. To provide specialized information services to appropriate segments of the wide community

The areas of library functions seem probably the aspects where ICT resources can be employed to an advantage to improve the services of university libraries. In recognition of the importance of ICT in the university library services with regards to the need for effective and efficient service, many universities with the assistance from the federal government have struggled to bring ICT facilities to their libraries. The Federal government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC), The Educational Trust Fund (ETF) as well as individual universities' efforts has made ICT facilities available in some of the university libraries for which north east zone of Nigeria is among the beneficiaries obviously. The provision of these facilities must have involved the expenditure of a huge amount of money. However, to successfully exploit the ICT facilities for full benefits, the library staff are the indispensable intermediary between the library materials and users. As a result, they must be able to use the

facilities effectively. With the ICT facilities, the professional librarians, Para-professional and other staff working in the university libraries who are the custodian and purveyors of information are challenged with new information to store, process and disseminate. The implication is that the library staff that is at the forefront of information provision in these university libraries must possess adequate ICT competencies to be able to maximize the facilities to full benefits. Abdulgany (2000) points out that the new information technology cannot be fully exploited if there is no adequate level of ICT competencies among the library staff. Given this, staff working in university libraries are now expected to be aware of and capable of using and demonstrating emerging ICT. They must be competent in the use of some basic ICT packages like the MS Office, Online databases, internet searches etc. Similarly, Ikpaahindi (1999) advocate's skills acquisitions requirement in the areas of knowledge of computer, how it functions; inputting and retrieval of information from it, ability to organize and use ICT based resources. It is therefore pertinent for university library staff to develop the required competencies in the area of ICT to augment the traditional library services. They must develop expertise in and establish program in knowledge search and management support of clientele's needs.

Competence is viewed as demonstrating the knowledge, skills, experience and attributes necessary to carry out a defined function effectively. It is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities at a level of expertise sufficient to be able to perform appropriately a given task in a work place. Federal library and information Centre (2011) human resources working group define competence as the knowledge, skills, and ability that defines and contribute to performance in a particular profession. Wojtezak (2000) defines competence in generic term as possession of satisfactory level of relevant knowledge and acquisition of a range of skills that include interpersonal and technical components at a certain point in the educational process.

Such knowledge and skill are necessary to perform the tasks that reflect the scope of professional practices. It is a combination of theoretical and practical experience that makes an individual able and willing to take the right decision in daily working environment. Competence creates a common bond of understanding and a common language for defining professional standard. Competences are the foundation of competency-based and management and continuous process improvement, ensuring that librarians have the knowledge, skills and abilities to accomplish mission requirements. They may be organized in a framework that differentiates and increase stages of expertise.

ICT competencies of library staff could therefore be viewed to be those relevant skills and knowledge to be acquired by those working in the library to be able to fully exploit information search, retrieval, and deliver using electronic format, . The library staff working in the northeast zone Nigerian University libraries are expected to possess the technique for gathering, processing and disseminating information to users via electronic format or skills required to effectively source information stored in electronic format, such as basic computer operating skills, internet, electronic document search skills, storage and information skills. They should also be competent in the use of some library software packages that can enable them handle the professional technical operations in the library such as cataloguing and classification and to generate users database. Hashim, and Mokhtar, (2011), McShain and Von Glinow, (2003), explained that competencies relate to librarians knowledge in the area of information sources, information access, technology, management and research including the ability to use these areas of knowledge as basis for providing library and information services. Hence, the role of libraries and the work of librarians have also changed drastically to meet the current requirement in providing quality library services. ICT has affected the ways librarians do things in libraries and

information centers. Librarians must acquire competencies required to cope with change in technological environment. Babu Vinayagammorthy and Gropalkrishnan, (2007) assert that the global trends are now characterized with fundamental shift from traditional environment to E-environment where emphasis is placed on the acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases. Librarians are moving beyond traditional role of collection and custodial duties to new task and function of translating and accessing resources beyond the role of physical library collection. As a result of this development, librarians are required to acquire competencies and to develop new ways of adopting newly evolving technologies that includes acquisition of library resources electronically. For this research therefore competencies and skills will be used interchangeable.

ICT competencies have great impact on overall library operation. The impacts of new technologies are felt by libraries in every aspect. Computing technology, communication technology and mass storage technology are some of the areas of continuous development that reshape the way that libraries access, retrieve, store, manipulate and disseminate information to users. The academic library has been from its inception an integral part of institutions of higher learning. Oyedum (2007) defines academic libraries as those libraries that are mainly found in tertiary institutions, they are established to support learning, teaching and research processes. Academic libraries have been affected by changes in information and communication technology. The rate of changes is still accelerating in this area. The introduction of various ICT trends has lead to reorganized, change in work patterns, and demand for new skills, job retraining and reclassification positions. Technological advancement such as the electronic database, online services, CD-ROMs and introduction of internet has radically transformed access to information. Rana (2009) opines that ICT holds the key to the success of modernizing

information services. Applications of ICT are numerous but mainly it is used in converting the existing paper-print records in the entire process of storage, retrieval and dissemination. ICT has impacted on every sphere of academic library activity especially in the form of the library collection development strategies, library building and consortia. ICT presents an opportunity to provide value-added information services and access to a wide variety of digital based information resources to their clients. Furthermore, academic libraries are also using modern ICTs to automate their core functions, implement efficient and effective library cooperation and resource sharing networks, implement management information systems, develop institutional repositories of digital local contents, and digital libraries and initiate ICT based capacity building programmes for library users.

ICT has brought unprecedented changes and transformation to academic library and information services, conventional LIS such as OPAC, users services, reference services, bibliographic services, current awareness services, Document delivery, interlibrary loan, Audio visual services and customer relations can be provided more efficiently and effectively using ICT, as they offer convenient time, place, cost effectiveness, faster and most-up-to-date dissemination and end users involvement in the library and information services process. Emergence of internet as the largest repository of information and knowledge, changed role of library and information science professionals from intermediary to facilitator, new tools for dissemination of information and shift from physical to virtual services environment and extinction of some conventional information services and emergence of new and innovational web based. The libraries will be networked, stocked with the core collection, and also provide access to worldwide knowledge and be virtual. Nowadays library automation is a core source. Effective ICT techniques used by libraries are found in circulation, a main task for library

services, which saves a lot of time for users as well as for library staff, and with the help of Web OPAC users can search information from anywhere. Users can easily reserve library resources through IOS, Android, and others. Some automation software provides images of the resources through multimedia applications. RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) can help to protect the resources from theft. Automation also enables users to use self-circulation systems. Various online ICT tools can be used for library operations like OCLC World cat, Classification Web, Web Dewey, the catalog calculator, and others.

These new trends in the application of ICT and computers to library operations and the allocation of information services bring pressure to libraries. The situational observation of ICT competency among library staff by previous researchers indicates not too impressive however it is evidence that ICT as a device for library operations and services. As far as ICT competency among library staff is concerned, Okojie (2007) believes that a lot of grounds still need to be covered as regards the deployment of ICT to work by library staff. She maintains that many librarians in Nigeria still do not have even the most basic ICT skills and cannot use the internet, despite all encouragements offered by the Nigerian Library Association to improve ICT competency development among librarians, through such awards as: Dr James O. Daniels award for best Library-based ICT Project and the Young Library and Information Professionals (YLIPs) by NLA to encourage creativity and innovation in the use of ICT among young librarians in Nigeria. Discussing on the challenges faced by reference librarians, Anyaogu (2007), lamented that many reference librarians possesses very low range of intellectual and professional competence to assist users. Also Ezeani and Ekere (2009) observe that ICT use is relatively low among practicing librarians especially the older librarians. There is usually inertia on their part. They advise that librarians must reinterpret traditional library skills and explore

new ways of putting these skills to work through effective use of ICT. Librarians must be versatile in the use of ICT. This does not suffice to say that library staff are not making effort to develop their competencies on ICT. As Anunobi (2004) notes, many librarians and library staff especially the younger staff with lower years in service are not lagging behind completely in information technology. They have some knowledge of computer but the competence to use the application to perform general library tasks is lacking. Library operations in many academic libraries in the country are more or less manual. Because many university libraries presently lack even the basic ICT facilities, this contributes to the low level of competencies of library staff.

It is expected that the findings of this study would be of benefit to librarians, curriculum developers, university management, students, library users and researchers. The study will be of great benefit to librarians by exposing them to know the type of ICT competencies they need to possess in order to perform optimally in the profession and develop themselves. This will help them to plan a rich academic course content that will incorporate ICT competency training programs. The findings will motivate University Management to provide the required quantity and quality of ICT facilities that will enhance teaching and learning of Library and Information students. This will also give trainers and educators in the library school a re-direction on focused areas of training and also help them to develop their own competencies in such areas. The study is also significant to students because librarians who acquire ICT competencies will be able to serve better by providing quality library services electronically and user education services. Library users will benefit from this study's outcome because if the library staff are well trained, they will render better services to the users. The study is also significant to researchers who wish to conduct similar research on the topic of the study and it would serve them with broadest collection and other essential requirements.

Finally the study will also contribute to existing body of knowledge in the area of library and Information studies that will be beneficial to future workers/researchers in the field of library and information science.

Expected Outcome

The study is expected to reveal the level of computer literacy possessed, determine the extent of ICT competency acquired, determine the level of ICT competency in adoption of ICT in cataloguing and classification, determine the level of digitalization and to also determine the strategies use in improving ICT competency of library staff in university libraries .

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