

Challenges of E-Library Services in Tertiary Institutions of Ebonyi State –Nigeria

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Abstract

E-libraries is also known and referred by various authors as either Virtual libraries or Digital libraries. Our society is currently witnessing a quick and continues transformation powered by ICT revolution which has find its way in all other field of human endeavors. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is becoming an integral part of education in all parts of the globe. Nigeria which Ebonyi is one among the 36 states is not left behind as ICT gradually finds its way into her educational systems regardless of persistent restrictions caused by our low economic status, the increasing numbers of E-libraries even in the young state like Ebonyi stands so encouraging. The advancement of E-libraries has ensured the emergence of global networked environment that has dramatically changed the face and operation of the old traditional libraries' functions, services including their storage and delivery systems. This paper after reviewing related literature works concerning libraries and its advantages, highlighted several challenges of E-library services in Tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state. Finally, it concludes that if E-libraries in tertiary institutions in the state are to survive, drastic and progressive action needs to be taken by Governments and sponsoring bodies to overcome some of the mentioned challenges.

Keywords: E-Library, Challenges, Tertiary Institutions, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

E-library is synonymous to both virtual library and digital library which is a library where services or collections of electronic resources are entirely virtual and access through internet service. An E-library does not have a physical space where interested persons can visit to access information or academic resources, instead distribution of resources are done electronically virtually. It is also called a paperless library. Digital libraries, E-libraries or virtual libraries are characterized by the following features as noted by (Costabile and Semeraro, (1998);

- ☞ Access to information over a network
- ☞ Facilitate immediate and simultaneous access to information
- ☞ They are interactive, i.e. support 2 ways communication with the users,
- ☞ They exist in multimedia format of text, video, graphics, sound and animation. Above all,
- ☞ It increases speed and effectiveness in finding information
- ☞ And also, decrease mental effort put into searching of information in the internet.

According to Irokwe (2001), a digital library is a library that harnesses digital technologies as infrastructure to search, collect, organize, store and distribute cultural, historical and scientific information whether it is text, visual images or sound. This means that all the operations/services of the traditional library are digitized or computerized. Such operations include selection and acquisition, cataloguing and classification etc. It comes into existence due to inconveniences of old system which is traditional library system. The E-library contains resources that are either born digital or digitized resources that pass through the process of transformation from hard to soft copies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

There is no single definition for E-libraries. Within the context of libraries, digital libraries may be viewed as technical services performed electronically with an entirely electronic application. The E-libraries are “a set of electronic resources and associated technical capabilities” and that are designed to serve specific users community, (Buckland's electronic library, 2012). Trivedi (2010) defined digital library as “a library in which collections resources are stored in digital formats (as opposed to print, microform, or other media) and accessible by computers.” Aman and Norliyanan (2002) stated that an electronic library also refer to as digital library or digital repository focused on collection of digital objects that can include text, visual material, audio material, video material, stored as electronic media formats (as opposed to print, micro form, or other media), along with means for organizing, storing, and retrieving the files and media contained in the library collection,” They also viewed it as “a potentially virtual organization, that comprehensively collects, manages and preserves for the long dept of time rich digital content, and offers to its targeted user communities specialized functionality on that

comprehensive codified policies.” Universally, Digital libraries are perceived as libraries in which all information resources are available in computer process through which acquisition, storage, preservation, retrieval and dissemination of resources are carried out using digital technologies. Mutula and Ojedokun (2008) noted that it is a library that contains no conventional print information resources, but electronic books, journals and newspapers. They further observed that the digital library may not occupy a physical space, where as users need to go and gain access to its electronic resources.

In another development, Li and Furht (2014) stated that digital libraries are systems that combine the machinery of digital computing storage and communication, in which the content, and software needed to reproduce, emulate and extend that services of collecting, cataloguing, finding and disseminating information offered by traditional libraries based on paper and other materials. “They also viewed digital libraries as systems providing a community of users with coherent access to a large, organized repository of information and knowledge.” The ability of the user to access, reorganize, and utilize this repository is enriched by the capability of digital technologies.

According to Irokwe (2001), a digital library is a library that harnesses digital technologies as infrastructure to search, collect, organize, store and distribute cultural, historical and scientific information whether it is text, visual images or sound. It also developed electronic catalogue of all library materials, networking this catalogue, so that users not only in the library but also from elsewhere can access it. Additionally, digital library includes the digitalization of locally produced information and the establishment of institutional repositories, to provide access to the scholarly material produced by members of the university communities.

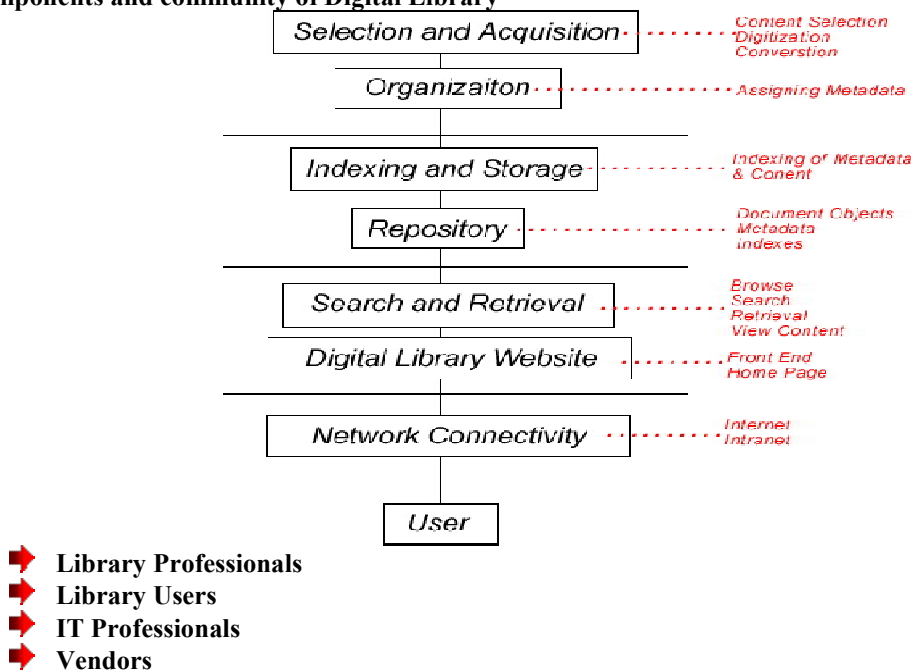
According to Daniel (2002), Nancy Schiller was one of the first writers to use the expression “virtual”. Schiller simply uses the term as “libraries in which computer and telecommunication technologies make access to a wide range of information resources possible.” All virtual libraries must, by virtue, be electronic, but not all electronic libraries are necessarily virtual. It is called ‘virtual’ because in a good electronic wide area networked library, Students and lecturers from the tertiary institution of Ebonyi state gets access to the E-libraries services in distance areas without physical movement.

Fabunmi (2009) added more light that the virtual library can consist of materials from a variety of separate libraries that are organized in a virtual space using computers and computer networks.

Powell (1994) defined VL as: “a library with little or no physical presence of books, periodicals, reading space, or support staff, that disseminates selective information directly to distributed library customers, usually electronically.”

Omolaye (2002) extended the definition to include access to electronic resources in the university library not only through the Internet but also other electronic/digital networks such as campus network or the intranet, without the physical need of the concerned community i.e. staff, students etc visiting the library. This is in line with the definition of Rosenberg (2005) as “a library where information resources are made available and accessible electronically, frequently over the internet.”

Components and community of Digital Library



BENEFITS OF E-LIBRARIES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EBONYI STATE

The following are the benefits of E-libraries to tertiary institution in Ebonyi state;

I. OPENNESS AND ACCESSIBILITY:

College and university librarians in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state just as their counterpart in other Tertiary institutions in Nigeria advocates for a new system of scholarly publishing that broadens public access and encourages their researchers to publish in open-access journals that can be produced at much lower costs than commercial publications. Shifting from closed to public access requires the cooperation of researchers and a rethinking of the tenure and promotion system. Hence, E-library supports, encourages and promotes openness and easy accessibility.

II. SUPPORT THE TRANSFORMATION TO ONLINE LEARNING:

As a physical entity, the Ebonyi state tertiary institutions campus library is typically perceived as the exclusive territory of the on-campus undergraduate only. The virtual college library, which provides access to vast amounts of digital content, is open to all campus constituents both full time students, part time students, graduates, undergraduates, full time lecturers, part time lecturers etc no matter where they may do their learning. Academic libraries are well positioned to support online learners. There are other ways in which we must support online learners, be it by providing online research instruction or delivering hardcopy materials. As more students take online or hybrid courses, the academic library infrastructure, honed for years to provide remote access support, will be there to serve them, and to help the institution make the transformation to digital education.

III. SUPPORT THE TRANSFORMATION TO HIGH PRODUCTIVITY:

Students don't have as much time as they likely to get to other very sensitive and important works that needs attention. Keeping up with new technology alone takes considerable time, and traditional higher education is in no position to allow its community members to fall behind in putting technology to use for learning and productivity. E-librarians are experts at transforming through technology and also helping others learn to use technologies to save time on tasks. Academic leaders should look to the campus library for support and guidance in applying technology to improve productivity. Librarians are enthusiastic partners in collaborating with others on campus to facilitate the transformation to increased productivity.

IV. SUPPORT THE TRANSFORMATION TO ALT-HIGHER ED:

Higher education no longer needs to be delivered by one institution in a linear pattern to students. Instead, students will soon be able to earn credits across a spectrum of providers through the internet. Academic librarians are already contemplating how they can be "alt-librarians" for alt-higher ed. Providing research support, library instruction and other services in this setting brings new challenges, but academic librarians are accustomed to change and will evolve in this new alt-librarian role.

V. PROMOTION OF LIBRARY USE THROUGH EFFECTIVE SERVICES

The main goal of digitization in academic library is to promote library use through effective services. Local and international recognition and respect are partly determined by quick accessibility to published works. Some highly productive scholars globally have been found to be more information rich than their counterparts. This implies that information adds significantly to the existing knowledge of the users. The information resources and services available in institutional information systems (library, archives, records offices, and documentation centers) are digitized and create databases capable of supporting research activities. The shift from print to electronic information means that both academic staff and students in a University system must use these resources for better quality, efficient, and effective research more than ever.

Digital libraries are libraries that are extended and enhanced through digital technology. Liand Furht (2014) noted that the important aspects of a digital library that may be extended and enhanced include: The collection of the library, The organization and management of the collections, Access to library items and the processing of the information contained in the items, The communication of information about the items.

They further stated that the objectives of digital libraries are: To speed up the systematic development of the means to collect, store, and organize information and knowledge in digital form, and of digital library collections.

- To promote the economical and efficient delivery of information to all parts of society
- To encourage co-operative efforts which leverage the considerable investment in research resources, computing and communication network.
- To strengthen communications and collaboration between and among the research, business, government and educational communities.
- To contribute to the lifelong learning opportunities of all people.

They concluded that digital libraries distribute a rich coherent set of information services (including selection, organization, access, distribution, and persistence) to users reliably and economically.

The cardinal objectives of academic libraries are designed primarily to serve their parent institutions most especially by meeting the teaching, research, and learning needs through provision of the services (conventional and digital) that can lead to an increase in the productivity of their students, teachers and researchers. To buttress

this, Trivedi (2010) stressed that digital libraries possess unlimited storage space at a much lower cost, enhance information users with coherent sources to a very large, organized repository of information and knowledge.

CHALLENGES OF E-LIBRARY IN EBONYI STATE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The preceding section has glaringly exposed the digital library situation in Nigeria. However, the development, and sustainability of digital libraries in Ebonyi state has the following challenges:

GROSS UNDER FUNDING OF E-LIBRARIES: Gross under funding of E-libraries and education, as well as their near total neglect is one of such issues of serious concern. In addition, the resources and facilities of most libraries in the tertiary institutions of the state have deteriorated to a very low level, at times even non existence. This is due to under funding or neglect by the concerned bodies. Many libraries have no e-mail, fax, telephone and computer based services (**Fabunmali, 2009**). E-libraries in tertiary institutions of Ebonyi state are mere ghosts of their former self and in deplorable conditions this factor.

POWER SUPPLY: Another major constraint to digital libraries or E-libraries services in the tertiary institutions of the Ebonyi state is epileptic power supply. This is inherited from the nature of electric power supply in the entire country. Nigeria is a country characterized with constant power outage. This tends to have negative effects on all developmental projects, and clearly portrays a potential danger. Digital libraries cannot survive in this kind of unfortunate and ugly condition.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) INFRASTRUCTURE Developing and sustaining a viable digital library or E-library system is heavily reliant on the provision of proper ICT infrastructure and other infrastructures. **Diso (2005)** has noted that Nigeria is severely disadvantaged in the area of ICT components such as the hardware, software, international bandwidth services, e.t.c. all of which constitute a barrier to E-libraries. Although there is an impressive and steady progress in the telecommunications sector in Nigeria in recent years, a lot of efforts need to be made to ensure its sustainability even in all states of the federation. Also, The constant experience disruption in electricity power supply and also vandalization of telephone wires in these tertiary institutions of the state affects digital libraries usage.

UNSTEADY NATURE OF THE NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY :Another major hindrance to the success of digital libraries in Nigeria which Ebonyi state inherits in this era of global change is the unstable nature of the National Information Technology Policy that was approved in 2001. **Diso (2008)** observed that despite the national effort to promote ICTs that resulted in the setting up of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), which was saddled with the responsibility of implementing the National Information Technology Policy, nothing much has been achieved regarding the IT policy. This has an adverse effect to all digital library or E-libraries initiatives in all state in Nigeria.

LACK OF COMPREHENSIVE AND ADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE OF ICTS

Finally, there is also the lack of comprehensive and adequate knowledge of ICTs among most information professionals in tertiary institutions of Ebonyi state. This is detrimental to the success of digital libraries in Nigeria, more importantly now when the world is moving towards a knowledge base society where ICTs serves as drivers.

LACK OF ACQUISITION OF NEW SKILLS AND TRAINING OF STAFF: It is a fact that Librarians need more than basic ICT skills, knowledge and experience to be able to cope with the challenges of managing the digital libraries.

SOLUTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The above issues constitute some of the major stumbling block to the success of digital libraries in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state. However, within this context this paper highly recommends that:

Ebonyi state government should give absolute priority to the information sector which is one of the key sectors for societal development. Adequate funds should be provided to libraries for their development and effective functioning. Also all digital library initiatives should be wholeheartedly supported.

The need for involving information professionals in all digital library initiatives. There is the need to intensify the training of such professionals in the area of ICTs, particularly on digitization, digital technologies, as well as web based skills, which are all essential prerequisites for digital library services.

Ebonyi state government should as a matter of urgency address the problems of infrastructures such as electricity and telecommunication networks. Also emphasis should be given to the accessibility and subscription of electronic information resources, locally relevant digitized information resources, as well as free web based information items by digital libraries in tertiary institutions of the state.

Adequate provision of proper ICT infrastructures such as hardware, software, and international bandwidth e.t.c. should also be given utmost concern. There should be a need for the libraries in tertiary institutions of the state to double their efforts in seeking for more funding and support towards the establishment of digital libraries and the upgrading of the existing ones.

From the above, the following could be recommended:

1. The virtual library project of the Nigerian University commission (NUC) should be well funded and managed to support the digital libraries in various universities.
2. Globalization is the main issue for a successful running of the digital library, therefore, there is the need for inter-library connectivity to facilitate information resource sharing in Nigeria.
3. There is need for Ebonyi state government and other concerned bodies to ensure a unified method of linking Nigeria University libraries together through a particular network.
4. Since the universities are in the hybrid stage in the country, it is advisable that the University libraries should maintain hybrid collections since our libraries cannot become completely digital in a short while.
5. University libraries in the state should adopt integrated system based on the latest web 4.0 and other data search and presentation standards which is a unified way of searching and presentation of result.

CONCLUSION

As the world is geared and heading towards a knowledge society, the roles of digital libraries will continue to evolve in this fast changing world without borders. To conclude, it is imperative to state the digital libraries have become powerful tools for providing access to networked global information resources. Therefore, if Nigeria is to play an active role in the global village, the issue of digital library development should not be handled with kid gloves. All hands must be on deck to overcome some of the major challenges and frustrations raised by this paper. The digital libraries today are providing service utilizing ICT facilities and infrastructures. Though they are faced with numerous challenges however, the university libraries could gradually overcome such challenges in the course of time. The most important, librarians should keep themselves abreast to the new technology and skills of the digital environment. Ebonyi state E-libraries also need the support of private establishment, federal and state government to overcome the challenges posed in the digital environment globalization.

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