



CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF E- LIBRARY PROJECT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC OFFA

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ABSTRACT

This study basically examines the challenges and prospects of electronic library development in academic libraries in Nigeria, using the Federal Polytechnic Offa as a case study. The paper discusses the benefit of e-resources in the library, the usage of electronic resources by the students and staff of the Federal Polytechnic Offa. A total of 600 hundred students and 100 staff were used during the period of this study for the population of this study. Survey research method was adopted for the study. A questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. Frequency counts and simple percentage were used in analysing the data collected. The Study revealed that the use of electronic resources has great impact on the academic performances of the students and improve the teaching skills of the academic staff of Federal Polytechnic Offa. However, there is the need to improve on the acquisition of ICT technique, this is in the areas of mastering of various search engines, there is also the need to improve on the poor signal of the internet.

Key Words: Challenges, Prospect, E-Library, Academic Library



Introduction

All libraries were established for the purpose of acquiring information resources and making them available for their customers. Paradigm Shift in Academic Library Services With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the role and position of libraries has dramatically changed. The rapid pace of development in the field of information technology and the advent of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the Library and Information Sciences (LIS) profession. The global trend is now characterized with a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases. Libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives. Based on the importance of information in an academic institution, this paper tend to study the prospect and the likely challenges faced in the process of replacing the manual methods of satisfying the information need of the library users with electronic resources.

Adeniran (2013) describe electronic information sources as the most recent development in information technology and are among the most powerful tools ever invented in human history. Kumar and Kumar (2008) observed that electronic information sources are becoming more and more important for the academic community. This study is a contribution to the development of electronic resources in academic libraries and a good foundation for academic planners to utilise in making vital decisions on the converting of traditional method of acquiring and dissemination of information to a latest method. The concept of electronic library is used interchangeably with digital library in most literature. Similarly, Dadzie (2005) commented on the advantages of electronic resources as an invaluable research tools that complement the print based resources in a traditional library setting. Their advantages, according to the author, include: access to information that might be restricted to the user due to geographical location or finances, access to more current information, and provision of extensive links to additional resources of related content.

A digital library is a collection of documents in organized electronic form, available on the Internet or on **CD-ROM** (compact-disk read-only memory) disks. Depending on the specific library, a user may be able to access magazine articles, books, papers, images, sound files, and videos. On the Internet, the use of a digital library is enhanced by a **broadband** connection such as cable modem or DSL. Dial-up connections can be used to access plain-text documents and some documents containing images, but for complex files and those with animated video content, a downstream data speed of at least several hundred kilobits per second (**Kbps**) can make the user's experience less tedious, as well as more informative. Internet-based digital libraries can be updated on a daily basis. This is one of the greatest assets of this emerging technology.

Association of Research Libraries (ARL) (1995), defines digital libraries as libraries whose collections are all stored in digital format and accessible via computer, the internet etc. This digital content can be stored locally or be accessible remotely. Furthermore, Online



Dictionary for Library and Information (2007) Defines a digital library as: “A library in which a significant proportion of their sources are available in machine readable format accessible by means of computers. The digital contents may be locally held or accessed remotely via computer networks. Reitz (2007) opined that in the libraries process of digitization began with the catalogue, moved to periodical indexes and abstracting services, then to periodicals and large reference works and finally to book publishing. ARL (1995) further emphasized that digital library is not a single entity and therefore required technology to link the resources of many, the linkage between digital libraries and information services are transparent to end users, also, digital collections are not limited to document surrogates and therefore extends to digital artifacts formats. With the above description by ARL (1995), it suggests that digital library can also be referred to as electronic library or virtual library since their collections can both be accessed electronically via the internet.

Having all these resources at its disposal suggest that virtual library is not only exciting but also an improvement of what obtains in the past due to better utilization of resources and faster speed of accessibility. In agreement with the above statement, Mahajan (2005) referred to digital libraries as organizations that provide resources such as specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interprets, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistent over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities. This suggests that digital libraries specifically required both the skills of librarians as well as those of computer scientists to be able to contribute their part for the libraries to achieve their goals. Without specialized skilled librarians who are adequately trained to use the digitization resources, the process may not function well.

Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes Singson and Leeladharan (2010) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research. Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many a time’s academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning.

Electronic Library Development in Federal Polytechnic, Offa

Whereas achievement of universal access to information and communication technology is a key mandate of the Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) has developed key strategies around facilitating connectivity for development within the nation. The E-Library project falls under this strategy and through this project; the fund aims to provide Public Libraries in all states of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with e-library equipment, software and solutions thereby making available to the citizens of these communities, online access to digital learning resources from around the globe. The objective of the e-library project is to provide a platform for an online searchable portal for displaying



library documents and educational database. This will ensure that the library users have unlimited access to a wealth of knowledge. The project shall create archival centres of excellence and one-stop resource centres spread across the country. The expectation is that the Libraries will buy into the immense potential presented by this grant and continue to build on it and improve on it in order to achieve their own mandates as penultimate learning and research centres for the country. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on 19/08/2011 between Polytechnic Offa and Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) Subsidiary of Nigeria Communication Commission and it was aimed to:

- i Facilitate the provision of access to ICT services within a reasonable distance to all persons in Nigeria.
- ii Facilitate provision of infrastructure development to rural and underserved areas in a non-discriminatory manner.
- iii Promote technology innovation services delivery.
- iv Promote competition in ICT services delivery.
- v Ensure effective utilization of funds to leverage investment in rural communications.
- vi. Support effective establishment efficient, self-sustaining, marketing-oriented businesses, which will continue to expand access to ICTs on their own initiative, requiring the amount of short and long-term fund support possible.
- vii Use ICT to promote greater social equity and inclusion for all the people in Nigeria.

Presently, fifty set of Computers, two printers, a scanner, server, one Generator and a set of furniture were provided by Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) for the take off of the e-library in the polytechnic. The facilities consist of the following E-resources: E-Granary, Ebscohost, E-Journals, E-Books, Internet Sources, and Elsevier Science-Direct

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the challenges and prospects of electronic library project in the Federal Polytechnic, Offa. This will be successfully carried out through the proper survey of the use of the e- resources. The study aimed at examining the impact of electronic resources on the education of the students and teaching pattern of the academic staff of Federal Polytechnic Offa, and the challenges faced in the cause of using this important method of acquiring and preserving information, for the use of library patron.

Research Questions

- 1 What is the extent of staff and students' awareness of the e-resources in the Polytechnic library?
- 2 What is the purpose and importance of the e-library to the educational development of students and the teaching academic staff?
- 3 What is the frequency use of the e-library resources by students and staff?
- 4 What are the challenges of using the e-library by staff and students?

Review of Related Literature

Libraries have the potentials to store much more information resources due to limited physical space to contain them. Digitization of resources opened up opportunities in Nigerian



University libraries for an improved searching and manipulation of information, improved facilities for information sharing, timely access to information and improved collaboration. The method of gathering information had dominated most literature in the past years; the advent of electronic resources is making the acquisition and dissemination of information over a wide range of distance and among a larger population at a time, without conflicting each other. Ani and Ahiauzu (2008) in Adeniran (2013) noted that the emergence of electronic information resources has tremendously transformed information- handling and management in Nigerian academic environment, and university libraries in particular. ARL(1995) in Dorcas (2012) further emphasized that digital library is not a single entity and therefore required technology to link the resources of many, the linkage between digital libraries and information services are transfer to end users, also, digital collections are not limited to document surrogates and therefore extends to digital artifacts formats.

With the above description by ARL (1995), it suggests that digital library can also be referred to as electronic library or virtual library since their collections can both be accessed electronically via internet resources. Having all these resources at its disposal suggest that virtual library is not only exciting but also an improvement of what obtains in the past due to better utilization of resources and faster speed of accessibility. In agreement with the above statement, Cleveland (2009) in Ibinaiye (2012) referred to digital libraries as organizations that provide resources such as specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interprets, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistent over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of community.

This suggests that digital libraries specifically required both the skills of librarians as well as those of computer scientists to be able to contribute their part for the libraries to achieve their goals. Without specialized skilled librarians who are adequately trained to use the digitized resources, the process may not function well. Digital libraries may not need to be a single, completely digital system that provides instant access. Conway (2010) described digitization of resources as a strategy for preservation.

Digitization process involved different stages of workflow, from the receipt of library collection to the loading of image and data to the database system. In view of the above statements and contributions by renowned scholars, one could therefore conclude by referring to digitization process as an exercise carried out in the library to provide a coherent organization of resources and convenient access to typically large amounts of digital information (Ibinaiye, 2012) Water (1998) summarized the major objectives of digitization of resources in the library as to creation of institutions repositories which can be accessed online. One of the specific objectives is to develop a mechanism for collection, storage and preservation of information resources. In agreement with Water statement, every institution should therefore adopt a new trend of creating an institutional repository that allows their resources to be accessed online. ARL have summarized the major requirements for digital libraries as: Hardware and software resources, a structural organization, skilled manpower, resources, management skills and technological skills.

Methodology



The research method adopted was a descriptive survey type designed to investigate the challenges and prospects of electronic library project in the Federal Polytechnic Offa library. A survey research method designed includes a purposive sampling technique that comprises population of six hundred (600) students and one hundred (100) staff of the Polytechnic. The instruments used for data collections were Questionnaire, and Observation. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage.

Presentation of Results

Seven hundred and sixty eight questionnaires were distributed and six hundred and five questionnaires were returned.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	200	28.57
Male	475	67.85
No response	25	3.58
Total	768	100

Table 1 above shows the gender distribution of respondents, which include students and staff of the Federal polytechnic Offa. It shows that 200 (28.57%) are female, 475(67.85%) are Male, while 25 (3.58%) respondents fail to return the questionnaire, respectively. The figure above can be interpreted that male student and staff dominate the users of electronic resources in Federal Polytechnic Offa.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents by Schools

Schools	Frequency	Percentage
Applied Sciences	75	10.71
Engineering	72	10.29
Environmental Studies	80	11.42
Management	95	13.58
Information and Communication Technology	134	19.14
Center for Continuing Education	124	17.71
Staff	95	13.58
No Response	25	3.57
Total	700	100

From table two above, it shows the breakdown of usage of e-resources by students and staff of Federal Polytechnic Offa. Participant in school of Applied Sciences is 75 (10.71%), Engineering 72 (10.29%), Environmental Studies 80 (11.42%), School of Management Studies 95(13.58%), School of Information and Communication Technology 134(19.14%), Center for Continue Education 124(17.71%), Staff, 95(13.58%), and participants that fail to respond are 25(3.57%) respectively. The interpretation of table two above, indicate that the School of Information and Communication Technology top the list of respondents, 134 (19.14%) and

followed by Center for Continue Education 95 (13.58%), School of Management Studies is the next, 95 (13.58%), and School of Environmental Studies 80 (11.42%), applied Science 75(10.71%), School of Engineering 72 (10,29%). The staff respondents is 95 (13.58%) and finally 25 (3.57%) constitute the respondents that failed to returned the administered questionnaires. It is easy to conclude that student in the school of Information and Communication Technology, is one of the largest schools in Federal polytechnic Offa, and they have a good understanding of the importance of e-resources in the library. This may be attributed to scarcity of printed materials on the most of the courses offered in this school. Students and staff alike now resulted to using the e-library as an alternative source of satisfying there information needs.

Table 3. Respondents level of awareness of electronic resources in the Polytechnic Library

Resources	Agreed	%	Disagree	%	Undecided	%	Total
Internet	660	94.29	15	2.14	25	3.57	700
Ebscohost	200	28.57	475	67.86	25	3.57	700
E-Granary	195	27.86	500	71.42	25	3.57	700
Elsevier/ Science Direct	200	28.57	475	67.86	25	3.57	700

From table 3 above, is observed that the highest respondent of 660 (94.29) are aware on the availability of internet as an electronic resources in the library. 15 (2.14%) disagree and 25(3.75%) are undecided. This can be linked with the global trend information on the believe that the world is a global village, so every individual is aware of the internet, though it does not implies that majority knows how to use the internet for acquisition of relevant information, particularly among youth of this days. In response to the awareness of Ebscohost e-resources, it can be deduced that few respondents are aware of this vital resources, this can be attributed to lack of adequate knowledge on e-resources available in the market. The same is applicable in the case of Elsevier/Science Direct, this is because of the high level of knowledge on various search engines and access to this journals are easy compared to other e-resources.

Table 4: Respondents Purpose of Use of E-resources

Purpose	Agreed (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Total
Research	190 (28.57)	475 (67.86)	35 (3.57)	700
Assignment	645 (92.14)	25 (3.58)	30 (4.28)	700
Social networking	670 (95.71)	5 (0.71)	25 (3.57)	700
Sports	456 (65.14)	201 (28.72)	43 (6.14)	700
News	140 (20.00)	470 (67.14)	90 (12.85)	700

The table 4 above shows the respondents purpose of using the e-resources in the library. The highest respondents of 190 (28.57%) uses the e-resources for research, the larger portion of these respondent are lecturer and student in the Higher National Diploma category of students; this may be because they are aware and appreciate the value of e-resources in the library. Some 475 (67.86%) respondents disagree with the use of e-resources for research, this category of respondents fall to the group of students who are not knowledgeable in the search for information on the net, or who do not have computer knowledge; even as 35 (3.57%)



respondents were undecided on the use of e-resources for research, this may be as a result of there in ability to interpret the question asked. The highest number of respondents 645(92.14%) agreed to the use of the e-resources for assignment. It is a general belief that the material available on the internet can solve most assignment given by the lecturers, and with this believe, a larger population of students relied on the internet resources for solutions to their information needs.

The introduction of Information Communication Technology, has brought about easy communication among youth, this has resulted to introduction of any social network, such as e-mail, facebook, 2go, badoo, twitter eskimi and host of others. The introduction of GSM also brings about easy communication. Though with certain restrictions, such as megabyte on phone, the e-library project has facilitated easy communication without any consideration for megabyte on the students telephone, since the Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) who are the donor of the e-library had paid for the subscription. The provision of e –library has reduced drastically the social vices in the school community, because students are often engaged with the social networks provided online.

Prospects of Electronic Library at Federal Polytechnic, Offa

The electronic library in Federal Polytechnic, Offa has many prospects among which are:

- 1 Universal Access: It enables people all over the world to gain access to a wide range of information at their finger tip
- 2 The use of space is reduced in the use of e-library. The traditional library require a lot of space, as the library acquire more collection, there will be need for more space. In the case of e-library little space is required.
- 3 The cost of maintaining an e-library is cheaper than that of traditional library. With the advent of e-library, little staff will be required in the library, this implies that money that will be used to pay salary and buying of more shelves can be used for other things in the library.
- 4 E-library will improve library cooperation, since there is no library that can be self sufficient in term of staff and resources.
- 5 The introduction of e-library can bring about more collaboration among libraries. They can contribute money to buy particular software, and even share resources.
 - 5 The introduction of e-library has reduced social vices among students of Federal Polytechnic, Offa.
 - 6 It is assisting students to prepare for examination and also lecturers to prepare for lectures.
 - 7 Students and Staff can make use of Open Access without paying for them.

Challenges of Electronic Library at the Federal Polytechnic, Offa

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



librarians in most libraries is still at the peripheral level. Many staff of the library are not computer literate as such they find it difficult to cope with the requirements of the electronic age.

Most of the sites on the internet are often designed to be paid for. In most cases, good articles are not allowed to be downloaded freely or found in Open access. The computers provided for the e-library are not many compare to the population of the student. This has brought about the designing of timetable for students and staff. The time allocated is not sufficient for use. Lack of adequate supply of electricity and cost of running the generator is also a great challenge for running the e-library.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has attempted to survey the prospects and challenges of e-library in the Federal polytechnic Offa. The latest advancement in the field of information technology have compelled libraries to embrace automation as the facilities provided by automated libraries go beyond the activities of traditional libraries (Ibinaye 2012) acquisition of e-resources have enhanced the effectiveness of library services including efficient organization and retrieval of information resources.

Findings from this study have necessitated the following recommendation:

- 1 The management of Federal Polytechnic Offa should ensure that the acquisition of information and Communication technology skills is acknowledged as one of the key learning objectives for it students so that students will be fully equipped to cope with the information intensive world. To this end more practical courses in ICT should be included in to the curriculum, and make it a general course for all the students.
-The library should develop a copyright mechanism that will not allow them to provide information without violating copyright law, by restricting users from duplicating intellectual contents from the web.
- 2 The library management should organize periodical training on the use of electronic resources for the staff and students of the Polytechnic.
- 3 The study showed high level of acceptance of e-library resources by staff and students of the Polytechnic, Offa. The management should ensure proper monitoring of the e-library project and create access to the use of electronic resources in the library, as a way of complementing the effort of NCC who had donated the e-library for betterment of education of the students and improvement on the teaching skills of the academic staff and the academic community as a whole.



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