

**RELEVANCE OF ELECTRONIC LIBRARY IN
ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES: FOCUS ON FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MINNA AND IBRAHIM
BADAMASI BABANGIDA, LAPAI LIBRARIES.**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relevance of electronic library in academic library services of Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study employed the survey method of research. 63 respondents were involved in the two institutions studied. Data from the study were collected using questionnaire instrument. The study revealed that the use of electronic library in academic libraries is relevant in discharging library services. The study also revealed that lack of basic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills amongst the library staff as well as lack of computer equipment and the failure of steady electricity power supply posed great challenges to the effective use of electronic library in the academic libraries. The study recommended that library staff be trained to know the basic skills of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to effectively perform library services and also provision of stable electricity power supply will assist in using electronic libraries in Nigeria.

Key Words: Academic library, Electronic library, Relevance, Services

Introduction

The advent of Information and Communication Technology has not only affected the manner and way by which people learn, but has also changed the method used by the Academic Libraries as institutions of learning to promote the learning process of their parent institutions or organizations. Today, a modern library has to provide a package of many related services with the help of computer networking which enables the interlinking of libraries and information centers to pool resources and services irrespective of their physical location (Kumar, 2001). In the past, an academic library which is the knowledge centre of any higher institution of learning be it Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities used to be limited to a particular geographical location, that is to say a four corner of a particular building within the parent institution where it is established; thereby restricting easy access to its holdings and creating discomfort in the learning process. This situation limits the efficiency of the library staff in the processing of information resources for quick access and easy retrieval since all the work is done manually.

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology has given rise to an electronic library which is not limited to either space or geographical location, and makes use of up-to-date technology in the processing of library holdings. It also provides the library users with the privileges of accessing academic library holdings in a more convenient manner without necessarily going to a particular location of a building since its holdings can be accessed with the use of computer at any time and in any location.

The electronic library which is also known as the library without walls is an electronically inclined library which makes use of computer in accessing its digital holdings such as CD-ROM, webpages, multimedia collections etc. The term "electronic library" has been defined by many different people in many different ways.

Library is a place where information resources are collected, processed and organized, stored, preserved and disseminated to the users of the library to meet their information needs. e-library depicts a library in which the holdings are found in electronic format and its contents can be accessed with the use of computer. It is a technological way to bring together the resources of various libraries and information services, both internal and external, all in one place, so users can find what they need quickly and easily (Riccio, 2001). Hence electronic libraries are organized collections of digital information. They are collections organized for a particular community of users, and are designed to support the information

needs of that community (Saracevic, 2000). Electronic libraries can provide resources in multimedia formats, including audio and video. The items in these electronic collections do not have to reside on one server, but they share a common interface to assist the user in accessing the collection.

Information resources that are located in a particular academic library can be accessed in other academic libraries around the world. This therefore, means that one can easily retrieve any information in relation to those information resources through inter-library sharing or collaboration with the aid of the electronic library.

Academic libraries exist in order to provide adequate services that would satisfy the information needs of the users. Thus, the Federal government through the university management provides fund for the building and maintenance of academic libraries in Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, studies on use and services of the academic libraries have revealed that the services rendered in academic libraries are not satisfying the needs of the users. Presently, most academic library users tend to search for their information needs outside their libraries. They prefer visiting the commercial cyber café where adequate Internet services are provided in order to search and retrieve their information needs.

This situation is really worrisome considering the fact that a lot is spent in providing library services in tertiary institutions. It is based on this background that it became necessary for one to carry out a study and identify why the services of the libraries in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are not satisfying the information needs of the users. Such knowledge is important especially these days that electronic libraries are identified and used as an indispensable tool in searching and retrieving information of various kinds. Provision of inadequate services in the libraries of tertiary institutions would lead to low use of the libraries which would invariably affect the academic achievement of the students. This will in turn cause a great loss of resources and budget on the side of the government towards academic library in Nigerian tertiary institutions and this need to be checked.

Concept of Electronic Library

The concept of "Electronic library" has been described by scholars and writers alike in different ways. In other words, the concept means many things to many experts. However, **Gbaje (2007)** has observed that the electronic library, digital library and virtual libraries are used synonymously despite the existence of some differences among the three terms. **Arms**

(2000) cited in **Abubakar (2009)** defined digital library as a “managed collection of information, with associated services, where information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network”. The **Digital (Electronic) Library Federation (1998)** considered digital libraries as Organizations that provide the resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistence 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. Similarly, **Rosenberg (2006)** from her own perspective views the digital library as a library where users access resources by electronic means and where information is delivered to users electronically.

From information management point of view, electronic libraries are systems that combine the machinery of digital computing, storage and communication, the content, and software needed to reproduce, emulate, and extend the services of collecting, cataloguing, finding and disseminating information offered by traditional libraries based on paper and other materials. A full service virtual library must not only fulfil all essential services provided by traditional libraries but also make good use of the advantages of digital technology.

E-libraries are viewed as systems providing a community of users with coherent access to a large, organized repository of information and knowledge. This organization of information is characterized by the absence of prior detailed knowledge of the uses of the information. The ability of the user to access, reorganize, and utilize this repository is enriched by the capabilities of digital technologies. The concept of an “Electronic (digital) library” is not merely equivalent to a digitized collection with information management tools. It is rather an environment to bring together collections, services, and people in support of the full life cycle of creation, dissemination, use, and preservation of data, information, and knowledge.

Electronic library (colloquially referred to as a digital library or library without walls). According to Greenstein (2002) electronic library is a library in which collections are stored in electronic media formats (as opposed to print, microform, or other media) and accessible via computers. Electronic content may be stored locally, or accessed remotely via computer networks with the aid of telecommunication links. Greenstein (2002) further stated that electronic library could also be referred to as a type of information retrieval system.

Also, one of the early foreseer Scientist like Bush in Candela (2011) foretold in his Technology Research Papers, that virtual library (digital libraries) would be a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is merchandized so that it could be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility from any location of the world.

Literature Review

Kumar (1995) discussed relevance of electronic library in providing library services and argued that application of computer to library has made the library work easier and faster for the library staff to accomplish in a more effective way. He further stated that library computerization or virtualization when properly applied has the tendency of bridging internationally acclaimed physical boundaries.

Kumar (1995) argued that the impact brought about by computerization of library services, has created a drastic positive change on how library services are being perceived by both the library staff and the library clientele; and it has by far exceeded the services rendered by the libraries when using a conventional method of carrying out library activities. In relation to the library clientele and their approach to electronic library, Lee and Dahlan (2005) asserted that the electronic library allows users to select from a vast amount of learning materials and at their own convenient, at any time without the constraint of geographical location.

According to Gunn & Hepburn (in press) 2002, electronic library provides opportunities for learning that are not possible in their physical counterparts. Whereas physical libraries operate with designated hours, electronic libraries are available and accessible anytime and anywhere with appropriate digital network (Internet connection). Grothkopf (2000) opined that due to the existence of electronic library

A paradigm shift takes place from libraries as collectors of items to libraries as facilitators of access to all kinds of information, provided by anybody, located anywhere in the world, accessible at any time.

Gunn (2002) asserted that electronic libraries especially those with customized collections facilitate just-in-time learning. Riel (1998) described just-in-time learning as learning needed for a particular task or purpose.

From the foregoing, one can conclude that electronic library is necessary for adequate library services and therefore needs to be given prime attention. This is necessary in order to assist the libraries in tertiary institutions to achieve their educational objectives; especially as electronic library services would always allow users to have access to the information resources within and outside the immediate environment.

This study therefore, investigates the effectiveness of electronic library in academic library services in tertiary institutions in Niger State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To determine the availability of electronic libraries in the surveyed University Libraries
- b) To assess electronic library services available in the surveyed University
- c) To investigate the frequency of use of electronic services the surveyed University libraries,
- d) To determine the relevance of electronic library in the surveyed University libraries,
- e) To identify ways of enhancing better provision of library services in the surveyed libraries.
- f) To determine the types of electronic resources provided by the surveyed libraries,

Methodology

This is why the study is necessary in order to identify the importance of electronic libraries in carrying out effective library development and services in academic libraries in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The descriptive survey research was used to collect data in the study. Two tertiary institutions were purposively selected from Niger State, one Federal University and one State University. The population of the study consists of all the staff working in the surveyed libraries. The population was 44 from FUT Minna library and 19 from IBBU Lapai, given a total of sixty-three (63) staff used as respondents for the study. The instrument employed for data

collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents during the working hours in their offices. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage tabulations were used in data analysis.

Data analysis

Table 1: Availability of Electronic libraries in FUT and IBBU Libraries

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Yes	53	84.1
No	10	15.9
Total	63	100

Table 1 disclosed that 84.1% of the respondents confirmed that electronic library is available in their academic libraries while 15.9% of respondents disagreed to this statement. Table 1 according to the finding reveals that the highest population 84.1% affirmed to the availability of electronic library in their academic libraries.

Table 2: Frequency in the use of Electronic Library.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Often	36	57.1
Sometimes	17	27.0
Rarely	10	15.9
Total	63	100

Table 2 identified how frequently the respondents make use of the electronic library in their various academic library services. It shows that 57.1% which is the highest number of the respondents often make use of the electronic library, 27.0% of them sometimes make use of the electronic library, while 15.9% of the respondents rarely make use of the electronic library. Table 2 therefore reveals that majority of the respondents, 57.1% often make use of the electronic library in the university libraries studied.

Table 3: Types of Electronic Resources available in the Surveyed Libraries

Electronic resources	RESPONSE							
	YES	Percentages (%)	NO	Percentages (%)	No Response	Percentages (%)	Total Response	Total Percentages (%)
Electronic books (e-books)	54	85.7	9	14.3	0	0	63	100
Electronic Newspapers (e-newspapers)	27	42.9	31	49.2	5	7.9	63	100
Electronic Journals (e-journals)	57	90.5	6	9.5	0	0	63	100
Electronic Magazines (e-magazines)	19	30.2	33	52.4	11	17.5	63	100
Electronic Mail (e-mail)	61	96.8	2	3.2	0	0	63	100
Electronic Theses (e-theses)	43	68.3	20	31.7	0	0	63	100
World wide web (www)	60	95.2	3	4.8	0	0	63	100
Electronic Research Report (e-report)	19	30.2	40	63.5	4	6.3	63	100
Internet connectivity	58	92.1	5	7.9	0	0	63	100
Electronic-databases	47	74.6	16	25.4	0	0	63	100
Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	17	27.0	37	58.7	9	14.3	63	100
Index Databases	19	30.2	42	66.7	2	3.17	63	100
Bibliographic Database	55	87.3	8	12.7	0	0	63	100
CD ROM	49	77.8	14	22.2	0	0	63	100
Electronic Data Archives	10	15.9	47	74.6	6	9.5	63	100
Electronic Manuscript	15	23.8	44	69.8	4	6.3	63	100
Online Reference work	13	20.6	40	63.5	10	15.9	63	100

Table 3 shows that among the electronic resources listed, availability of e-mail had the highest response rate of 96.8%. Also, 95.2% of the respondents agreed that World Wide Web (www) is available and 92.1% of the respondents also agreed that Internet connectivity is available in their libraries. Similarly, 90.5% of the respondents agreed that electronic journals are available. In the same vein, 87.3% of the respondents agreed that bibliographic database is available. Also, 85.7% of them agreed that electronic books are available, 77.8% of them agreed that the CD ROM is available, 74.6% of the respondents agreed that access to electronic databases is available, and 68.3% agreed that electronic theses are available. Similarly, 42.9% of the respondents agreed that electronic newspapers are available, 30.2% of them agreed to the availability of the following: Electronic Magazines 30.2%, Electronic Research Report 30.2%, and Electronic Index Databases 30.2%. Also, 27.0% of the respondents agreed to the availability of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), 23.8% of the respondents agreed that electronic manuscripts are available, 20.6% of the respondents agreed that Online Reference work is available, while 15.9% of the respondents agreed that electronic data archives are available. From Table 3 one can deduce that Electronic mail (e-mail) is the most electronic resources available in the libraries studied.

Table 4: Types of Electronic Library services available in the Surveyed Libraries.

Electronic library services	REPOSSES							
	SA	Perce- tages (%)	A	Perce- tages (%)	D	Perce- tages (%)	SD	Perce- tages (%)
Provision of adequate information services e.g. e-books, e-journals, CD ROMs etc.	40	55.6	27	42.9	1	1.6	0	0
Provision of electronic document delivery services to its users	19	30.2	31	49.2	8	12.7	5	7.9
Assist staff and students in using subject information base gateway	39	63.5	15	23.8	2	3.17	6	9.5
Provision of enough printer/training for its users in retrieving information on the web	35	61.9	18	28.6	4	6.3	2	3.2
Provision of timely, current and accurate information for its users.	17	27.0	31	49.2	10	15.9	6	9.5
Provide internet connection for online based academic work	23	36.5	15	23.8	12	19.0	13	20.6

From Table 4, it is shown that among the electronic library services provided by the two academic libraries, 87.3% of the respondents indicated the provision of assistance to staff and students in using subject information base gateway. Similarly, 90.5% of the respondents indicated that their electronic library provides enough printer/training for its users in retrieving information on the Web. In relation to the provision of adequate information resources e.g. e-books, e – journals, CD ROOMs etc. 98.5% of the respondents gave positive responses. In the case of provision of Internet connection for online based academic work by the electronic library, 60.3% of the respondents gave positive response. However, 79.4% of the respondents indicated that the provision of electronic document delivery services to the users is available in their libraries, while 76.2% of the respondents stated that timely, current and accurate information for the users is usually available in their libraries. Table 4 therefore reveals that the provision of adequate information resources such as e-books, e-journals, CD ROM etc. are the major services provided in the electronic library of the academic libraries studied.

Table 5: Relevance of Electronic Library in the Academic Library Services.

Responses	SA	Perce- tages (%)	A	Perce- tages (%)	D	Perce- tages (%)	SD	Perce- tages (%)
Very important	30	47.6	5	7.9	2	3.2	0	0
Important	10	15.9	6	9.5	0	0	0	0
Somewhat important	3	4.8	7	11.1	0	0	0	0
Not important	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No option	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

From Table 5 it is revealed that 80.9% of the respondents stated that electronic library services are relevant in providing adequate services in academic libraries.

Table 6: Ways of enhancing Electronic Library services in the academic libraries.

Responses	SA	Perce- Tages (%)	A	Perce- tages (%)	D	Perce- tages (%)	SD	Perce- tages (%)
Provision of adequate Computer facilities	6	9.5	3	4.8	0	0	2	3.2
Training staff on the use of ICT in library	9	14.3	7	11.1	0	0	0	0
Installation of Library software on Computer systems	5	7.9	2	3.2	3	4.8	0	0
Steady Electrical Power Supply	11	17.5	4	6.3	2	3.2	0	0
Provision of adequate funding in the management of electronic library.	4	6.3	3	4.8	3	4.8	2	3.2

Table 6 shows that 23.8% of the respondents disclosed that the provision of steady electrical power supply would enhance electronic library services in academic libraries. Similarly, 25.4% of the respondents disclosed that the training of staff is paramount to the enhancement of electronic library services. In the same vein, 14.3% of the respondents indicated that the provision of adequate computer facilities will enhance the electronic library services. Also, 11.1% of the respondents stated that the installation of library software on computer systems will enhance the electronic library services. Similarly, 11.1% of the respondents reported that the provision of adequate funding in the management of electronic library will enhance the electronic library services in their academic libraries. Table 6 therefore reveals that the major means of enhancing electronic library services in academic libraries is by giving the library staff adequate ICT training.

Discussion

This is not surprising since electronic libraries are generally viewed as systems providing a community of users with coherent access to a large, organized repository of information and knowledge. Accessibility of information resources makes learning an interesting exercise and the academic library with electronic libraries can easily make resources available for specific assignments for the users.

The study also revealed in Table 2 that majority (59.1%) of the respondents indicated that they frequently use electronic library in their academic libraries. This is necessary considering the benefits libraries derive from

ICT facilities generally and electronic library specifically. Stressing on the benefits of electronic libraries, Ogunsola (2005) noted that Federal Ministry of Education had embarked on the establishment of National Virtual Library Project with the aim of sharing locally-available resources with libraries all over the world using digital technology.

In determining the electronic library resources available in Nigerian academic libraries, literature has revealed that the advent of electronic libraries in Nigeria is a recent development and as such the implementation is still at its low level. No wonder, the study revealed that electronic resources such as email, World Wide Web (WWW), Internet connectivity, electronic journals, bibliographic database etc are the mostly available electronic resources in Nigerian academic libraries such as FUT Minna and IBBU Lapai libraries. These resources are inadequate compared to what is observed in most advanced countries of the world. This is why **Gbaje (2007)** observed that the National Universities Commission Virtual Library Project (NUCVL) initiated in early 2002, the National Board for Colleges of Education Virtual Library (NBCOEVL), the National Open University Library Project (NOUNLP) and the UNESCO Virtual Library Pilot Project (UVLPP) initiated in 2003 were some of the various initiatives by the Nigerian Ministry of Education regarding electronic libraries for higher institutions in Nigeria, yet none of the efforts had actually yielded any meaningful functional electronic (digital) library services in the academic libraries since that time.

Nonetheless, the emergence of electronic library into the learning process of higher institutions in Nigeria has brought a great deal of positive changes, not only on the side of the library users, but also on the side of the academic library as an institution of knowledge which is saddled with the responsibility of acquiring, processing, storing, retrieving and dissemination of relevant information resources. This to a great extent has equally improved the services rendered to users. Probably this could be the reason why majority of the respondents revealed in Table 5 that electronic library is relevant to library services in academic libraries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Electronic library has made a great impact in the various library services in Nigeria academic libraries, Hence the management of the academic libraries should strive to provide relevant electronic library services in their libraries. This is important because the advent of electronic library services has not only radically transformed the way information processing is being handled in most libraries today, but has also improved the method used in

imparting knowledge on the library users. Development of electronic library in academic libraries would be a good factor that would always attract users to visit their libraries thereby encouraging them to achieve their educational objectives.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were provided:

1. Library staff in FUT Minna and IBBU Lapai should be adequately trained to have the basic knowledge and skills in ICT, in order to enable them provide adequate services to users in the use of electronic library.
2. The management of the university libraries should persuade university management to provide adequate electricity power supply in order to facilitate the smooth running of the electronic library in their libraries.
3. Library management should provide enough computer systems in the university libraries in order to accommodate more users of electronic library.
4. Library management should endeavour to provide adequate funding in order to ensure continuous maintenance of electronic library available in their libraries.

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