

OPEN ACCESS INITIATIVES IN ENSURING FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION: IMPERATIVES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE

By

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Abstract

This study investigated types and use of Library software packages, type of digital management software for library administration and services in academic libraries in two universities in Benue State. Benue State University (BSU) and University of Agriculture Makurdi. (UAM) as a case study. The population comprised 32 Academic Librarians in the two institutions. A structured questionnaire (OAI) was used for data collection and a direct observation. Data generated were from 29 respondents representing 90.6%. It was analyzed using simple percentages. The findings revealed that; 100% of Librarians within these universities use KOHA which is an integrated library software; KOHA is currently trending due to its flexibility and features of expansion of its modules. A number of factors also revealed the challenges in ensuring open access initiatives, they are: lack of Inter-library Loaning system, infrastructural defects in terms of wide Area Network (WAN) and Local Area Network inaccessible to interact within the library building; Poor technical know-how and inadequate software application training to academic librarians.

Key words: Open access, Information access, Academic Libraries

Introduction

Academic libraries in Nigeria is saddled with high demand of services as a result of emerging technologies that has brought about new innovation to library activities. Libraries now preserve both hard and soft-copies of their information resources. Meaning that, for academic librarians to thrive in the technology-enabled world in this second-decade of 21st century, there is need for high-level skills in the use of digital technologies which are essentials for citizens (Bulu and Champerswar 2007). Tonmay (2019) asserted that, the 21st century can be likened as the revolutionary age where technology have been playing a major role in every sector. One of the raging trends and global pace is the automation of academic libraries, it is a major flocuse in new technologies meant to improve globalized standards of academic libraries, these developments are seen in library information networks, web-based library information services, internet online services, integrated library software as well as digital library administration and management services to mention a few. University libraries started using computers to provide information services to their users lonag ago. They began by developing their own sstems during the 1960s and 1970s, progressed to the provision of circulation systems, then moved to online cataloging systems, and finally to integrated libry systems (Qari, 2012).

There are different definition of Library application software which are based on diverse experience. Dhanavandan (2012) defined library application software as the application of

automatic and semi automatic data processing machines to perform functions such as acquisition, circulation, cataloguing, reference service and serial control. Vimal & Mayeed (2019) opined that, we need team work for a successful migration from the propriety software and switch to KOHA. Koha software shows maturity in features and functions and suitable for all types of libraries. Libraries with no automation software can directly implement Koha and start the automation processes from the scratch. Riewe (2008) is of the opinion that the main type of software in use at the libraries today is the Integrated Library System (ILS) which is the modern equivalent of the card catalog. The ILS has functions such as; tracking of book loans, a search interface to the library catalog. It entirely automate all library tasks. Its major challenge is the poor technical know how.

Earlier generations of library management software developed to address the requirements of the printed collection. Nowadays integrated library management software need to represent both print and digital resources. Integrated library systems should address the requirements of cooperation and resource sharing among libraries. Libraries expect the features like cooperative collection development, discovery services, inter-library loan, collection analysis, sharing of print and digital resources with library management systems to meet the user requirements (Machovec 2014). Modern integrated library systems characters are cloud-based, security tightened, social media integrated with mobile and web interfaces. Koha almost fulfills the requirements of libraries in a networked environment.

Koha has the provision and capability to work with add-on modules to extend the services. Electronic databases, digital and institutional repositories are occupying virtual space of academic libraries today. The digital management software system in use for administrative purposes by most academic universities such as Greenstone, Dspace and Inventro Pro to mention a few. These digital management software has the modules for security checks of students or clientele using the library facilities. Another module is the Bursary Module where the students profile is displayed with the updates of payment of tuition, and lastly several modules for example customized identity cards for both staff and students, statistics of users of the library is collated with the help of scanners and Stand-alone computers used for administrative purpose.

Statement of the Problem

Most academic libraries are embracing automation, in spite of fundamental challenges, it is pertinent to diffuse Academic Librarians functionality in the use and maintenance of these open access software packages to suit effective and efficient service delivery in academic libraries. However, these universities under study specifies the type of open access library application software used in ensuring effective access to information and the efficacy of the particular library application software in line with skillful perfection, applicability and durability which is the reason for this study.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To determine the type of library application software package in used in universities in Benue State.
- ii. To determine the type of digital management of software used for administrative services in the university libraries in Benue State.
- iii. Ascertain level of adequate use of library application of software packages in university libraries in Benue State.
- iv. Challenges faced by the academic librarians in use of library application of software packages in university libraries in Benue State.

Research Questions

- i. What is the type of library application of software packages used in university libraries in Benue State.
- ii. What is the type of digital management software used for administrative services in the University libraries in Benue State.
- iii. What is the level of adequacy in the use of library application of software packages in university libraries in Benue State.
- iv. What are the challenges encountered by academic librarians in the use of library application software packages in the university libraries in Benue State.

Literature Review

The major responsibility of a library irrespective of the type is concerned with management of information sources such as: acquisition or collection, processing, storage and preservation and dissemination of information. The ancient methods of maintaining libraries services have long been modified with the introduction of new technologies into the library mainstream to boost the library housekeeping routine and services for efficiency in retrieval and dissemination of information and better service for the clientele, application of software packages for academic librarians has become absolutely indispensable in all spheres of life in academic libraries most especially.

Ezeani (2011) asserted that digital literacy refers to the ability to evaluate internet sources which differs qualitatively and quantitatively from evaluative skills required for printed materials, she put digital literacy as the ability of an academic Librarian to understand, information use from varieties of digital sources. In the same vein, Kyrian (2018) suggested in his study that, librarians in the digital environment can only be relevant if they digitalize their local content for preservation and easy access.

The Integrated Library System enables easy access of information as narrated in a study on awareness, availability and utilization of open sources software in Nigerian libraries Ukachi (2012) identifies some library software database used in libraries in Africa are micro CDS/ISIS (free), library plus (replaced by X-LIB software), Green stone software, Graphical library automation (replaced information navigator library software TINLIB, ALICE for windows software, Documents, strategic library automation Management (SLAM), Liberty 3 software Micro CDS/ISIS and KOHA software which began in 1999, funded by a group of libraries in rural New Zealand that found proprietary software expensive and lacking some needed features.

KOHA is the world's best open source library automation software used in academic, public and special libraries around the world at the moment. Its modules fully covers, acquisition, serials, cataloging, reports, and tools for add on module in the library. It is standard compliant to MARC 21 or (UNIMARC) for cataloging, Z39.5 for copy cataloging. KOHA App software is updated and currently has features which uses the OPAC interface also to avert insecurity in the academic libraries in terms of theft, vandalism and loss of library resources

Methodology

The research method used for this study is the descriptive survey design. The population of the study is 32 which consists of all Academic Librarians from the two universities in Benue State. Owing to the small size of the population, total enumeration technique was employed. The instruments used is a structured questionnaire (OAI) and a direct observation of the universities under study. Twenty nine 29 (90%) out of 32 questionnaire administered to the respondents available and valid for data analysis was returned and found valid for data analysis. Data generated were analyzed using simple percentages.

Data Analysis Technique

The Descriptive statistical tool was used to analyze the data collected. The results were presented in frequency tables. The researcher in addition used statistical tools by means of percentage and frequency, in analyzing data from the research questions.

Research Findings

The result of data analysis is presented below. Findings revealed that 29 questionnaire were returned.

Table 1: Gender Representation of Academic Librarians

Male	20	-	69%
Female	9	-	31.%
TOTAL	29		100

Table 1 revealed the representations of the Male Academic Librarians are on the high side which doubles in the number of female at 30.96%.

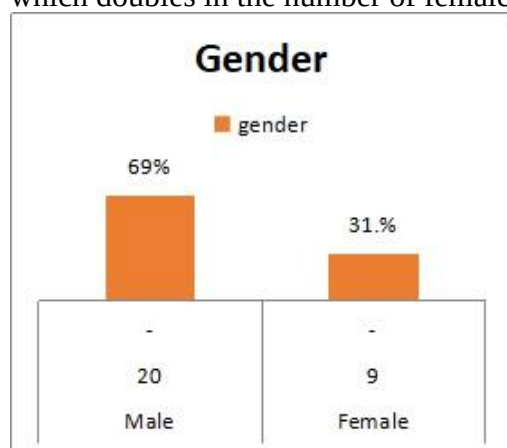


Table 2: Rank of the respondents

S/NO	DESIGNATION	NO OF STAFF	PERCENTAGES	CUMULATIVE
1	Associat Prof	2	6.8	6.8
2	Senior Librarian	4	14.1	14.1
3	Librarian I	3	10.3	10.3
4	Librarian II	7	24	28
5	Assistant Librarian	5	17	17
6	Graduate Librarian	8	27.6	27.6
7	TOTAL	29	100	100

Table 2 revealed that there are (8) Graduate Librarians representing 27.6%, seven Librarian II cadre (7) 24% of the population, Assistant Librarians are five (5) 17%, there are four (4) 14% senior Librarians and three (3) 10% of Librarian I in both universities. This indicates a higher number of lower cadre of Academic Librarians who are saddled with the responsibility of carrying out the use of these library software packages for library service deliveries.

Table 3: Educational background of respondents

QUALIFICATION	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES %	CUMMULATIVE
BS.c LIS	7	24	24
MS.c LIS	19	65.3	65.3
PhD	3	10.3	10.3
TOTAL	29	100	100

Table 3 indicates that a good number of academic librarians in the two universities have a good educational background with (19) representing 65.36% of them having MLIS degree and seven 7 24% with BLIS while (3) 10.34% have acquired Ph.D Degree.

Table 4: Types of Library Application Software Packages Used in Each Library

S/N	Statement	Frequencies	percentages %
1	KOHA	29	100
2	E-lib	0	0
3	Vitua	0	0
4	TinLib	0	0
5	Glas	0	0
6	CDS/ISIS	0	0
7	Alice	0	0
	TOTAL	29	100

From table 4, it was evident that the two universities under study used KOHA which is an integrated Library Software.

Table 5: Type of digital management software used for administrative services in the Library

S/N	Digital management software used for administrative services (DMSA)	Frequency	Percentage %
1	DSpace	6 [BSU]	20.64
2	Greenstone	11 [FUAM]	37.84
3	Inventro Pro	12 [BSU]	41.28
	TOTAL		100

Table 5 indicates that (12) representing 41.28% respondents from Benue State University (BSU) use the Inventro Pro software for administrative services, and (6) representing 20.64% academic librarians use Dspace in BSU one may ask, why only a few response on its use and functionality could be a reason for this few response. respondents from Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi FUAM (11) representing 37.84% use Greenstone for administrative library services (DMSA).

Table 6: Level of LASP and DMSA Use in the Library

S/N	LEVEL OF USE	Frequency	Percentages %
1	Library application software packages	26	89
2	Digital management software in use for administrative services	20	68

Table 6 indicates the adequate use of Library application software packages which is the KOHA with a high rate of 89% response from both universities, while 68% response rate on use of Digital Management software indicates a low functionality. This could be related to some challenge in application of Library software packages.

Table 7: Challenges faced by the Academic Librarians in the use of LASP and DMSA

S/No	VARIABLES	STRONGLY	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY	TOTAL %
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		AGREE			DISAGREE	
1	Poor technical know-how on maintenance	13 (44.7%)	10 (34.4%)	5 (17.2%)	1 (3.44%)	29 (100%)
2	Inter-library Loaning system not incorporated	13 (44.7%)	15 (51.6%)	-	1 (3.44%)	29 (100%)
3	Inconsistency of automation reports	7 (24.08%)	12 (41.3%)	8 (27.5%)	2 (6.9%)	29 (100%)
4	Inadequate training on the software application	8 (27.5%)	15 (51.6%)	6 (20.6%)	-	29 (100%)
5	Epileptic power supply	17 (58.4%)	12 (41.3%)	-	-	29 (100%)
6	Difficult access to internet and the uniform resources locator (URL)	8 (27.5%)	14 (48.1%)	6 (20.6%)	-	29 (100%)
7	Infrastructural defects in terms of Wide Area Network(WAN) and a Local Area Network (LAN) inaccessible within the library building	9 (30.9%)	15 (51.6%)	4 (13.7%)	1 (3.44%)	29 (100%)

Table 7 presents multiple responses of the respondents on challenges of the use of LASP and DMSA which is mostly indicated on Epileptic power supply in the libraries representing 17 (58.4%) strongly agreed, while 12 (41.3%) agree that epileptic power supply in the libraries is a major challenge. This is followed by none inter-library Loaning system 15 (51.6%) agree that it is a challenge in the same vein, 13 (44.7%) strongly agree. Another challenge is in infrastructural defects in terms of wide area network (WAN) and LAN been inaccessible in some areas within the library building 15 (51.6%) agree and 9 (30.9%) strongly agree. Poor technical know-how and inadequate software application training to academic librarians strongly agree representing 13 (44.7%) while 10 (34.44%) agree respectively. The analysis corresponds with the Riewe 2008 findings.

Discussion of Findings

The result from the findings revealed that, 100% of Librarians within these universities uses KOHA which is an integrated library software. This is because of the flexible and durable features and expansion of the modules. There are potentials of adequate use of this software as it regards to productive inputs by the couple of educational background, population and level of academic librarians in the university libraries under study, which could collaborate in making a successful use of the open access software for effective and efficient library service delivery. In the light of the fore going, the challenges posed to these software packages used by academic librarians in universities in Benue State are hereby discussed: Findings revealed a number of factors against adequate implementation of the open access for free information access to students in an academic environment in the state. These challenges include the following; Epileptic power supply in the libraries, none Inter-library Loaning system, infrastructural defects in terms of wide area network (WAN) and Local area network (LAN) which is been inaccessible within the library building, Poor technical know-how and inadequate software application training to academic librarians.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Library management should provide alternative power sources, which has the capacity to supplement the electrical needs of the entire library building.
- Increase training programs on the library application software packages to every section of the library by organizing and sponsoring external and internal workshop and training to enable academic librarians acquire technical know-how skills and competencies in the participative use of library application software packages being a current trend in delivering library services.
- The University Libraries should collaborate through consortia agreements in order to acquire and share relevant online resources that could compliment hard copies use and incorporate Inter-library loaning system.

Conclusion

A team of academic librarians within the University Libraries require skills which are set for managing and disseminating open access services through the use of KOHA innovative system, incorporate the sharing culture of open source software to synchronize with the library application software packages project. It is only then, librarians can contribute to the software community users and keep-in-touch with the modules subsequent updates or changes. It is also necessary to share its practical usage experience within the university library communities as well as guidelines on how KOHA migration into various library departments could give insights as a background information and inspiration for other types of libraries in the state.

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