

THE LIBRARY AND ITS ICT ROLES IN PROMOTING DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

BY

UKAEGBU, BERNADETTE CHINASA NKEIRUKA (CLN)

DONALD E. U. EKONG LIBRARY,
UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT,
RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

bernadette.ukaegbu@gmail.com

08038780005

Abstract

Distance education as an important form of educational programme has done a lot of good in increasing the literacy rate of Nigerian citizens and the world over. This paper looked at the use of Information and Communication Technology (CT), the library and the librarians in achieving the objectives of distance education to bringing about effective learning. The objectives of distance education outlined by the Nigerian National Policy on Education were highlighted the impact of ICT on distance education was discussed looking at the services provided by ICT the library and the librarians in supporting distance learning. Factors challenging the use of ICT and roles of Library were listed and strategies to combat them were suggested It was concluded that distance education currently cannot achieve the desired goals without effective ICT and library services The strategies for combating the challenges were suggested, for instance, that distance education institution should give the establishment of ICT centre apriority in a well-equipped and functional library, among others.

Keywords: Distance Education, Library and Librarians Roles, Information, and Communication Technology Use.

Introduction

Globalization brought about so many effects which include information and knowledge explosion among others. Many people use different means and media while aspiring to acquire education at all levels. Knowledge is acquired through education which could be formal and informal. This brought distance education into focus and it could be said to be one of the most important developments in the educational system. Thus, Omoyemi, (2001) called it one of the greatest innovations in Nigerian education that serves as a source of educational hope for thousands of people. Distance education is a form of educational programme that provides basic and tertiary education to many Nigerians; who may not have had the opportunity and resources to attend regular programmes. This type of programme has been made possible through Internet Communication Technology (ICT), the library and librarians. Globalization, which signifies worldwide growth, has turned the world into a global village. Its efforts in providing the information resources, book and non-book materials needed for the programme cannot be quantified. The government, at the national, is determined to make distance educational programmes a success through its policy statements,

(National Policy on Education, 2004). Thus, the revised National Policy on Education by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004) provides the objectives of this distance education. Thus:

- i. Providing access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied it.
- ii. Meeting special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their workplaces.
- iii. Ameliorating the effects of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing
- iv. Nigerian experts as teachers, regardless of their locations or places of work.
- v. Encouraging internationalization, especially in tertiary education curricula.

The above-listed objectives are not achievable without Internet and Communication Technology

(ICT: application to education that produces richer learning. ICT encourages unlimited means of achieving educational goals as it enhances critical thinking Thus, Iloanusi and Osuagwu, (2011) think that ICT of any kind produces richer learning outcomes compared to education without ICT The automated library with its book and non-book materials and information scientist as the librarians, play tangible roles in fostering distance education by way of articulating and providing useful resources to support research and learning. This is only achievable through the roles of the library and the librarians in harnessing the library's ICT usage and delivering its services as the life-wire of any institution.

What then is distance education?

Many scholars have advanced different explanations for distance education. Naufman, Watkins and Guerra, (2000) think that distance education means the provision of useful learning opportunities at convenient Places and times for the learners, irrespective of the institutions providing them. Yusuf (2006) gave differing terms for distance education such as distance teaching-learning, correspondence study education, home study, external study and independent study for him, distance education encompasses other terms. Distance education varies from different degree programmes such as National Certificate of Education (NC Diploma in Education, and Postgraduate Diploma in Education, which is possible through distance learning systems

National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a distance learning that is outstanding in Nigeria. The NOUN has adequate means for on-line learning through the web and for e-learning generally. This is why there cannot be any sound distance education without ICT the National Open University of Nigeria, (NOUN according to Eze and Uzigwe, (2012) is the first dedicated university to introduce education through distance learning in Nigeria. The NOUN has adequate means for online learning through the use of the web and Tor e-learning, in general, using dedicated television channels (NOUN 2008 This shows that there cannot be

any sound distance education programme without ICT they aim to provide instructional resources through an intensive use of ICT Internet Communication Technology, on distance education involves the use of all form is of computers, communication networks, and mobile technologies like phones, to mediate information plays important role in the world today Any country that lacks information is said to be dead Therefore, ICT through which information is communicated to people is also the avenue through which knowledge gotten from education is communicated to many people all over the world. ICT has of course come to be at the centre of all aspects of human endeavour. Information obtained through ICT involves the retrieval, processing storage and dissemination of such to people who have the need. The application of ICT education increases service delivery, and access to knowledge and at the same time improves the curriculum. Hence. Duncomb and leeks. (1999) viewed ICT as the electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information. The Internet is a computer network consisting of a worldwide network of computers. It is an off-shoot of ICT and is the main medium through which different transactions are made with computers

Good communication with sound access, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information is a basis for distance education programmes for successful learning To Yusuf, (2006) good communication promotes needed interaction between teacher and student in teaching/learning situations Since distance education does not entail face to face contact, media interaction has to be used to promote teacher-student and student-teacher interactions such media is engrafted in ICT which gives freedom of choice in learning

Roles of the library in promoting distance education through ICT

The library plays a very important role in the provision of its services and resources to this programme, (distance education) just in the same manner does to regular programme. Therefore, the students in distance education do to regular programmes. Programme ought to be given all forms of library resources and services like loaning books, access to information websites, reference services circulation r services, research, long essays and intact, giving all forms of user education is required. This importance of services means that any institution should put the library and its services in their planning, organization and management. This is because of the role of the library as an academic life-wire of any institution Thus, Fufuri, (2008) called distant librarianship that which is concerned with planning and developing library and information services that support tertiary education programmes; which is offered in off-campus on part-time basis Fufuri quoted Watson. (2003) identified the roles of libraries working in distance educational institutions as:

- (a) Developing and maintaining quality distance education information resources like reading lists for students and course developers.
- (b) Ensuring the conformity of library and information services with accreditation requirements
- (c) Helping distance education learners acquire library skills, critical thinking study and information literature skills (user education).

- (d) Advising distance educators on new and appropriate course materials.
- (e) Supporting the research and scholarship activities of distance education staff.
- (f) Identifying other institutions that can assist with delivering distance library services to students,

Libraries serving distant learning institutions and students (learners) should try to provide a variety of library and information services. Eze and Uzigwe, (2012) citing Kavilya, (2004) noted the need for distance education students to utilize reference services, book reserves, inter-library loans and access to electronic databases, among others. He stressed that a narrow experience is achievable for distance education students when the services provided by the library are ignored. The main Library and information services that need to be provided for distance education students are the varieties of information resources like course materials,

- (a) Textbooks, reference and journal materials.
- (b) Providing them with reference assistance.
- (c) Providing bibliographic, textual and multimedia database
- (d) Giving them information literacy skills.
- (e) Consultation for enquiries through traditional and electronic modes of correspondence
- (f) Giving them prompt access to materials and document delivery
- (g) Providing them with inter-library co-operation.

Giving the above listed needs, the library services should be automated and provide the users with information needs which will ensure maximum satisfaction through ICT distance education programmes, educators, the institutions and the students need the library. Its resources and services, for the wellbeing of the entire programme. This is achievable through ICT

Librarians' responsibilities toward distance education:

Gone are the days when Librarians only sit, dust the textbooks, Watch Over the books, re-organize and loan books. Technology has brought a lot of change regarding librarians' responsibilities. Hence, Young. (1999) observed that Librarians are gradually moving into different roles, having been orchestrated by the new technology that brought about new services implementation Librarians now have the opportunity of using modern tools in providing; quicker and more sophisticated services to users, The Librarians service which include selection and acquisition of print materials, audio-visuals, CD ROMs, use of the right professionally maintained database, go analyzing publishers to select the most trustworthy ones, deciding current database for the institutions' computer systems and software, cataloguing and classification of books, videos, CD-ROMs in a manner that will be useful to the users, also create, add and share international database through electronic and the internet

Information literacy teaching skill is one of the roles of librarians that come with technology in the information age. Therefore, the internet has added new challenges to librarians in these areas. The technical services unit librarianship works with computer experts to create websites and intranet which is information architecture that librarians use to organize information in their library services organization.

Challenges:

As already known, executing any project is not an easy task. Such must be with some hinges in the course of undertaking it. Those factors limit the integration of ICT into education programmes in institutions in Niger generally. Such hinges to the enhancement of distance education using ICT and library supportive role are:

-Paucity of ICT infrastructure and access. This includes poor reliable computer networks, inadequate funding to purchase good quality ICT, power outage effective communication systems and high enrolments of students.

Wright with Dhanarajan, (2012) and Reju, (2009) think that open and distance education programmes in institutions of learning are limited by the listed hinges above.

Fufuri, (2008) also observed that libraries in developing countries are understaffed and under-resourced. These make the libraries unable to provide maximally the range of services and materials needed to support distance education learners.

Mabawonku, (2004) thinks that the resources and ICT facilities in Nigerian public libraries which ought to support distance education are inadequate, overstretched and poor in the provision of the needs of academic and research staff and students respectively. There are outdated textbooks, and the journal subscriptions are irregular. There are very few audio-visual and ICT resources available in the libraries which are meant to take care of the information needs of the users.

Conclusion:

Distance education is a type of education instituted to give opportunity to many people to gain formal education. These people under normal circumstances may not have been opportune to attend formal and regular programmes. It is a form of education that reaches the learners (from the teachers) without having a form of classroom physical setting. This is made possible through the library ICT: which provides the information services needed for the programmes. Here, the Librarians: who are the information scientists make use of ICT improvising information services to the learners to support the programmes

The way forward:

To be able to overcome the challenges, the following should be done:

- (a) Distance education should recognize the library and its information services needs through 1CT which aids in promoting the programmes.
- (b) Libraries and distance education initiating institutions should collaborate for effective library usage by the students and for their information services.
- (c) Institutions organizing distance education should collaborate with donor agencies like Mark Arthur Foundation for assistance in ICT area.
- (d) Distance education institutions should make the establishment of 1CTcentre a priority in a well-equipped and functional library.
- (e) User education skills should be inculcated into distance education programmes.

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