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ICT IN LIBRARY SERVICES DELIVERY

Lbrn. Princess Lilian Irokah (CLN) [1]; Lbrn. Enyinnah A. U. PhD [2]; Lbrn. Uhiara Humphery E. [3]
Dr. Ogbonnaya Onuh Polytechnic, Aba, Abia State
Princesslilian13@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of ICT in library services delivery, assessing both its advantages and limitations. The discussion is framed within the context of academic, public and special libraries. The paper stated some objectives and covered areas including elements of library service delivery, benefits of ICT in library service delivery, some challenges like Lack of Comprehensive ICT Policies, Interrupted Power Supply, Financial Constraints, Lack of IT Skilled Staff, Poor Infrastructure, Poor Information Literacy Skills, Poor Internet Connection. The paper suggested amongst others, Improved ICT Policies, Improved Power Supply, Improved Finance, Quality Staff, Improved Infrastructure, Improved Information Literacy Skills, Improved Internet Connectivity. The paper concludes that libraries must embrace ICT in their service delivery to enhance user satisfaction.

Keywords: ICT, Service delivery, Libraries

Introduction

Information has become paramount in the 21st century, with the invention of computers and the advancement of information technology playing a crucial role in modern society. With the explosion of information and technological advancements, information is no longer limited to printed materials available in a single physical location. Thus, Information and communication technology (ICT), refer to the technologies that are used to collect, store, edit and communicate information in various format (Raji, 2018). Hence, they can be used to access, retrieve, store, organize, manipulate, produce, present and exchange information by electronic and other automated means. Onodugo (2016) explains that they include hardware, software and telecommunication in the form of personal computers, scanners, digital cameras, phones, faxes, modems, CD and DVD (Digital view disc), players and records, digitized video, radio and TV programmes and multimedia programme.

Formally, library collections were contained in a physical structure and consisted of physical information resources like books, periodicals, encyclopedias and so on. Now, library collection comprises both the physical materials and electronic information resources and services. Libraries have become one of the institutions mostly used to manage, disseminate and preserve knowledge. They try to meet the demands and needs of the current and future users. In other words, satisfying the educational needs, cultural needs and the general information needs of their users. (Essien, et al, 2022).

The technological change and its resultant transition from printing to digital publications have affected how information is managed, processed and utilized. In the past, library collection and services made of only printed materials and physical services delivery, the advent of ICT has enabled libraries to move beyond physical spaces, offering digital resources, online services, and automated processes (Kumar & Singh, 2020). This has enabled library staff to manage, process and disseminate information across the globe. As a result, users can now have access to libraries' multimedia information remotely from anywhere in the world. However, the digital transformation of libraries is not without challenges, including financial constraints, technological obsolescence, and the digital divide (Bawden and Robinson, 2018).

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Aims and Objectives

This article aims to examine the role of ICT in library services delivery, assessing both its advantages and limitations. The discussion is framed within the context of academic, public and special libraries.

Objectives

- To explore how ICT enhances accessibility and efficiency in libraries.
- To identify the library delivery services ICT can enhance.
- To identify key ICT tools and applications used in library services.
- To discuss benefits and challenges associated with ICT integration
- To propose future directions for ICT in library services.

Areas of Library Services Delivery

ICT in libraries has transformed how information is stored, retrieved, acquired, catalogued and classified. It has also revolutionized material circulation, serial control, management, statistical analysis, and administrative tasks like budgeting. This achieved the provision of more efficient information services to users and overall improvement in the performance of the libraries. Hence, librarians need to understand the various ways to function effectively in service delivery. The following are some of the element of services delivery in libraries:

Current Awareness Services: This is a service where the librarian compiles list of new and current document and notifies library information users. The library of today should not merely store documents and preserve them, it must also devise means of using mails, Newsletters and other digital means to communicate with registered users and keep them updated on new arrivals in the library especially in their identified areas of interest.

Online Instruction/User Education Library Users: Implementation of online bibliographic and library user programmes includes features like virtual library tours and online tutorials on search engines. According to Odunola, Yakub and Adeniran, (2018), libraries can also use the internet or CD ROMS to educate users. Libraries now implement web-based versions of reader's advisory services to include informing users about new arrivals, provide reviews and recommendations and web usage.

Inter-library Loan Services: There is no library in the world that can boast of having all the materials to meet the information needs of their users. No matter how large the collection is, there would be need to share resources with libraries within the same geographical zone. Libraries of today implement an ICT-based interlibrary lending system, through the use electronic networks for documents delivery. They are mainly in potable documents format (PDF) and they delivered to library users' desktops.

Circulation Services: This services are services to library clienteles and most of these services are been provided using ICTs. Ebunuwele, Ola and Uduebor 2014 in Igajah and Onyekweodiri (2021) explained that ICTs is used in circulation/customer service operations to obtain statistical information from the system such as the total number of book borrowed, subject by subject and number. The system can equally print overdue notice, and books available on the new arrival to the library. The ICT tools can be used to carry out book checks at the point of borrowing and retrieval.

Real Time Services: A new and exciting method of digital reference service that libraries are attempting to provide is live reference. These are real time, interactive reference services in which the user can talk to a real, live reference librarian at any time, from anywhere in the world. User and librarians can interact using chat technologies. Applications like **Ask a Librarian** enhances user support, especially for remote learners. (Hernon and Matthews, 2017).

Automated of Library Operation: Library automation system such as Koha and **ExLibris,** facilitate cataloguing, circulation and acquisition, reducing manual workload (Ramesh and Reddy,2019). Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) allow user to search and reserve books remotely.

Reprographic Services: Libraries employ the services of photocopiers for making duplicate copies of information material and making them readily accessible.

Digital Preservation: Digitization efforts ensure the long-term preservation of fragile historical documents. Technologies like **OCR (Optical Character Recognition)** and **cloud storage** help protect valuable resources (Conway, 2020).

Benefits of ICT in Libraries

ICT integration has transformed libraries in several ways:

- **Increases Accessibility:** Users can access resources they need remotely, eliminating geographical barriers. (Smith and Duddan, 2020).
- **Improved Efficiency:** Automated cataloguing and self-service kiosks reduce workload and enhance service delivery (Chowdhury, 2019).
- **User-Centric Services:** Personalized recommendations and AI-driven search engines improve user experience (Bates, 2021).
- **Cost Effective Operations:** Digital collections reduce printing and storage costs (Tenopir et al. 2021).

Challenges of ICTs in Library Services Delivery

The use of information and communication technology is beginning to spread widely and its flexibility of place and time of delivery information is beginning to receive greater attention, hence the need to take proactive measures towards the challenges associated with its iuse in libraries. Although they are many challenges to be addressed. These include:

- **Lack of Comprehensive ICT Policies:** ICT policy statement should be terse and straightforward in order to achieve the set target or goal. The information sector in this nation is not treasured. Until that is done, ICT policies will continue to suffer lapses.
- **Interrupted Power Supply:** Power supply in libraries has been a call for concern, which has been a draw back to the slow pace of service-oriented function of the library. Meanwhile, electricity is required for facilitating library services, among which are; referral, documentation, acquisition, organization, charging and discharging of library information resource and knowledge sharing.
- **Financial Constraints:** Financial constraint has been identified as challenge to library services delivery through ICT. Acquiring and maintaining ICT infrastructure requires significant investment, which is a challenge for libraries with limited budgets (Rafiq and Ameen, 2020).
- **Lack of IT Skilled Staff:** Westerlund (2019) affirm that lack of IT skilled staff in most Nigerian libraries has posed a danger to effective utilization of online information sources and services.. Just as Chigbu and Idoko (2013) asserted that some librarians in Nigeria are not competent to take on the challenging role of 21st century information service delivery. When library staff who are meant to be an intermediary and facilitators of these technologies are not skilled towards it usage, eventually reluctant will creep into it, thereby hindering satisfaction and decay in the system.
- **Poor Infrastructure:** Infrastructural development in most libraries are nothing to write home about and no concrete strategies to liberate the situation.
- **Poor Information Literacy Skills:** The poor utilization library resources both print and electronic resources have been linked to lack of skills to understand when and where information resides..
- **Poor Internet Connection:** Isreal and Edesiri (2014) state that poor internet connection is a part of the challenges to effective service delivery. Poor internet connectivity limit access to digital resources, disrupts online catalogue and services, difficult in providing remote services, reduce staff efficiency.

Suggestion

In view of the various challenges identified in the library service delivery, the following suggestions are offered:

- **Improved ICT Policies:** Libraries should collaborate with stakeholders to create well-defined ICT policies covering digital resource management, cybersecurity, data privacy, and infrastructure development.
- **Improved Power Supply:** Power supply should be improved in order to have effective and smooth service delivery. Ensuring stable electricity with backup generator or solar power.
- **Improved Finance:** To overcome financial constraints in libraries and improve service delivery, libraries can advocate for increased budget allocation from government and parent institutions. Other ways are introducing paid services such as printing, photocopying, and internet access to generate revenue.
- **Quality Staff:** Employment of IT qualified library staff and even staff that are willing to undergo training in IT areas will go a long way to enhance service delivery in libraries.
- **Improved Infrastructure:** Libraries can improve their structure by advocating for increased government funding for library infrastructure, encouraging institutions and local authorities to prioritize library renovations and technological upgrades.
- **Improved Information Literacy Skills:** For library to run effective service delivery, library must conduct information literacy training for it staff and users, develop user guides and tutorials, collaborate with schools and faculty to include information literacy in curricula and promote awareness campaigns.
- **Improved Internet Connectivity:** Libraries can improve on their internet connectivity by upgrading their internet infrastructure, using multiple internet providers, optimize network configuration, expand Wi-Fi coverage, provide offline services and encouraging downloading for offline use.

Conclusion

This work was set out to examine the role of ICT in library services delivery, assessing both its advantages and limitations as the discussion is framed within the context of academic, public and special libraries. ICT has become an indispensable tool in modern library services, enhancing efficiency, accessibility, and engagement. However, challenges such as lack of comprehensive ICT policies, financial constraints, lack of IT skilled staff and others must be addressed. Libraries must adopt sustainable ICT strategies to maximize benefits while ensuring equitable access for all.

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