IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE OF ICT IN PROVISION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to explore the crucial role, impact and importance of Information and CommunicationTechnology (ICT) in management and provision of library services, and its implication to present day scenario. ICT is a term used in the library to refer to application of computers andother technologies to library practices such as acquisition, storage, organization anddissemination of information. The world has become a global village and with ICT, manylibrary users now have access to vast sea of information, without necessarily investing muchtime or energy. The process of generally and distributing information is now being facilitatedthrough the use of ICT.ICT involves incorporation of a range oftechnologies that are used to support communication and information dissemination.The paper further identified the challenges of ICT application in libraries. It wasrecommended among others that, there should be improvement in the capacity and level of ICTadoption by libraries. This paper also attempts to get vast benefits of ICT in utilization of libraries.

Keywords:Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Libraries, Library services, Institutions, Organizations

INTRODUCTION

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has remained a catalyst in the issue ofnational advancement and development. Information, as power is effectively an infiniteresource and a vital tool needed for the development of all sectors in any nation. It is therefore,imperative that application in libraries would go a long way in satisfying the information needof the citizens. It is worthy of note, that the emergence of ICT has impacted greatly on thequality of information provided through libraries. It also enables proper and adequate provisionof library services to library users from all disciplines. In this 21st century, the drastic role ofICT in library operations cannot be over emphasized. Many library routines and operations thatwere initially performed manually are now being converted to computerized operations whichmeans, applications of ICT techniques to providing better and faster services to the end users.A nation without functional libraries and information centres may lack access to informationthat would enable her sustainable development. In this era of globalization, in which the worldis connected, information gains its power through permanent storage and wide distribution,which could be achieved through ICT.The use of ICT improves accessto digital information, narrows down the digital divide and also improves standard of living.Adoption of ICT in libraries is a way of improving on information services provided

inlibraries. This is an era, when people need to access timely information with ease, and this canonly be done through the application of ICT to library services. It is also a way of contributingto sustainable development of the nation, since timely and effective provision of usefulinformation can assist in building up a society ICT as an enabling tool, assist libraries inprovision of information, which is very paramount to development of the various sectors in thenation. Libraries are playing a very important role facilitating access to global information andknowledge resources, using ICT.Apparently, ICTs are indispensable tools needed for provision of value addedinformation that support the sustainable development. Many institutions andorganizations including libraries face diverse challenges in the process of integrating ICTs totheir services. Nevertheless, information provision is paramount to development and growth ofany nation. It is therefore important that, effort is made to enable usability of ICTs in all sectors,of the nation ICT and library services.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ❖ To study the different components of ICT in provision of library services
- ❖ To emphasize the benefits of ICT in libraries
- ❖ To study the challenges facing by libraries in the implementation of ICT
- ❖ To provide recommendations for the improvement of ICT in libraries
- ❖ To study the impact and importance of ICT in provision of Library services

COMPONENTS OF ICT IN PROVISION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

The advent of ICT is indeed a boost to the library services as it now assists manylibrarians to use their ICT potentials to reach out to library users. Some of the ICT-based services that are provided by libraries as follows:

- ❖ **Provision of web access to OPAC:** Libraries are providing access to web-based Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) interfaces. The OPAC makes it easier for users to access and use information resources. OPAC is the computer form of library catalogue, to access materials in the library.

- ❖ **Electronic Document Delivery:** Libraries implement ICT-based interlibrary lending system, through the use of electronic networks for documents delivery. In essence, the Document Delivery Service (DDS) enables a library to use copies of research papers or other research document, from other libraries. These documents could be journal articles or other documents in digital format. They are mainly in portable document format (PDF) and they delivered to library users' desktops.

- ❖ **Online Readers Advisory Services:** Libraries now implement web-based versions of reader's advisory services to include informing users about new acquisitions, provide reviews and recommendations and so on in using the web.
- ❖ **Networked Information Resources:** Libraries now provide users with access to networked information such as database, electronic scholarly journals and other publications from various publishers.
- ❖ The services rendered in a library differ from one library to another, depending on the type of library, the type of patrons and the parent body's objectives. Other library services as highlighted include:

  - ➢ Reference Service
  - ➢ Current Awareness Services (CAS)
  - ➢ Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)
  - ➢ Reprographic Service
  - ➢ Exhibition and Display
  - ➢ Technical Services
  - ➢ Serials Control
  - ➢ Computerized Interactive Search
  - ➢ Borrowing, Renewing and Reserving

❖ **Reprographic Technology:** These are widely used in libraries globally. Reprographic machines are provided in libraries to ease photocopying of documents on demand.

❖ **Library Retrieval System:** This involves the use of compact disc read only memory (CDROM), a technological mechanism for acquisition of specialized CD-ROM databases in various discipline such as law, sciences, medicine technology, agriculture, humanities and so on.

❖ **Indexing and Abstracting Services:** It is a service that is carried out to provide summaries of documents and also to assign descriptors for referencing documents.

❖ **Institutional Repositories:** It is an online archive for collection, preservation and dissemination of digital copies of the intellectual output of academic or research of institution, this could be journal articles as well as digital versions of theses and dissertations. This service is mostly provided in academic or research libraries.

❖ **Document Scanning Services:** Scanner is important equipment in modernization of library. It is useful for scanning text, image and content page of books and providing great help for establishing digital and virtual library.

BENEFITS OF ICT IN LIBRARIES

Globalization driven by ICT is presently having phenomenal impact on librarypractices ICTSs are significant and useful tools for sustainable development in all fields andall aspects of our society. ICTs provide means to actualizing developmental goals in education,health, agriculture, business and commerce among others. The introduction of ICTs in education had brought about computerization of traditional materialssuch as books, journals newspaper and other information resources in the library. This has alsoled to the existence of virtual library. Educational researchers, through the use of ICT canaccess current literature materials with ease. ICTs also encourage collaboration amongresearchers irrespective of their locations.

Internet provides up-to-date information on any subject. Likewise, earlier researchfindings can be easily accessed through the internet. In the area of agriculture, ICTs are beingused to provide farmers with information as regards their plants and animals, which willeventually improve their productivity.

On professional duties, computers are used to automate different manual functions.Acquisition, cataloguing of library materials, circulation, cataloguing of library materials,circulation and serials management are now automated in libraries, using available software inthe market. ICTs enable libraries to locate store, retrieve and disseminate information. ICTtools such as CD-ROM, e-mail are used in libraries for dissemination of information. Inaddition, digitization of information resources which involves converting print resources toelectronic form is also carried out, using ICT.

Other benefits of ICT in libraries include:

➢ Provision of speedy and easy access to information.
➢ Provision of remote and round the clock access to users.
➢ Provision of access to unlimited information from different sources.
➢ ICT enable easier, faster, cheaper and more effective library operations.
➢ ICT helps to manage information overload as information retrieval is made easier incomputerized systems.
➢ Computerization helps the library to save space and reduce paper.

There is no doubt that integration of ICT into provision of library services is able tobring great benefits to the entire community and nation. ICT which remains an enabling toolfor provision of timely and current library and information services is also indispensable to thesustainable development. ICT can be applied toevery aspects of

human endeavor to achieve result oriented service delivery.Using ICT tools enable organizations andinstitutions to provide services more effectively.

CHALLENGES OF USING ICT FOR PROVISION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

There is awareness that a lot of benefits are derived, through the adoption and use ofInformation and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in libraries, nevertheless, there are manychallenges to be addressed. These include:

- ❖ **Limited Financial Resources:** The acquisition and maintenance of the relevant equipment depends on the availability of fund. Mostly, there is paucity of funds in many libraries leading to inability to acquire, the necessary ICTs that would enable them connect to the internet, make subscription to various online database and obtain software licenses.
- ❖ **Shortage of ICT Facilities and ICT Skills:** The computers are used to receive and store large volumes of information. Likewise, the internet accessibility is made possible through the use of computer and they are used to access Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and also to perform many other routine activities in the library. Shortage of computers and other facilities remains a big challenge to many libraries. Many librarians also lack the ICT skills and this makes it difficult for them to embrace technological innovations. Lack of ICT skills places a serious restriction on the application of ICT to provision of library services. When ICT policies are not available or adequately implemented, it can affect the sustainability of a nation's development.
- ❖ **Lack of ICT Policies:** There is lack of systematic ICT policy in developing countries and it impedes the deployment of ICTs.
- ❖ **Poor maintenance of ICT Equipment:** Many libraries do not have space and conducive environments for keeping ICT equipment. In addition, most of the ICT equipment are not adequately maintained in most libraries as a result of the maintenance cost which is usually very high.
- ❖ **Erratic Power Supply:** In developing countries, large areas are still without a reliable supply of electricity.

Other challenges are:

- ❖ Insufficient bandwidth.
- ❖ Lack of technical IT knowledge by library staff.
- ❖ Constant change of software and hardware.
- ❖ Copyright and intellectual property right management.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, it is recommended that:

- ❖ Fund should be provided to libraries on regular basis. All libraries, irrespective of the type need strong financial support from the parent organization.
- ❖ Provision of standards standby generator in libraries, to serve the computers and other ICT facilities in case of power outage. In addition to this, the government in particular, should strive to permanently solve the challenges confronting the power sector.
- ❖ The librarians must become higher system thinkers and fully equip themselves to work in digital and computer environment.
- ❖ The Government must encourage and ensure that libraries acquire ICT tools for effective library operations and information disseminations.

- ❖ Policies that would encourage the deployment and development of ICTs in all institution should be formulated and implemented for the nation's development to be sustained.
- ❖ The government should make library and information services, a part of national development initiatives and plans.
- ❖ Training and retraining of all categories library staff should be organized on regular basis. The ICT largely depends on ability of staff to operate ICT facilities. The training should include needed skills and techniques for data input into the computer, internet surfing and using different telecommunication facilities to exchange information.

CONCLUSION

Application of ICT to provision of library services is a crucial effort towards sustainabledevelopment of any country. Therefore, for libraries to remain agents that will facilitate sustainabledevelopment, efforts must be made to provide the right information at the right time. With theICT in place, the objectives of libraries will not only be achieved but it will also help librariesto compete with their counterparts in the developed world. Developing countries must also recognize ICT as key strategic tool for sustainable development. Organizations,institutions including the library must be supported and encouraged to embrace and utilize ICT for efficient and effective delivery of service.

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