

MODERN PRACTICES IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE: THEMES, TRENDS AND ISSUES

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Edited by:

**Pearl C. Akanwa
Tunde K. Omopupa
Rotimi A. Egunjobi**

**►Johnson A. Akerele
►Lucky O. Urhiewhu
►Bilamin O. Popoola**

E-LIBRARY DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, RESOURCES AND SERVICES IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Tunde K. OMOPUPA, Johnson A. AKERELE & Biliamin O. POPOOLA

Introduction

The electronic library (or e-library) is one of the latest focus in library operations across Nigeria. With advancements in library technology, as well as the packaging, storage and access to information, the need to ensure adequate access to electronic information has become an important aspect of library services and operations. Consequently, libraries continue to establish e-libraries as an avenue for users to link up with electronic resources, and also as a pre-requisite by accreditation bodies for libraries in Nigerian higher institutions. Meanwhile, the idea of e-library is not new in librarianship. For many years, libraries have made effort to automate their operations and even put in place online public access catalogues. Libraries have also invested in audio-visual resources to make it possible for users to access information in CDs, DVDs and other digital media formats. Libraries have also been subscribing to electronic databases to make sure that the users have access to current literature that are beyond what the library can or have space to acquire.

Library and information science professionals have come to the agreement that no library can have the space or financial strength to house all the resources needed by its users. While it is essential to have a large collection, the definition of what constitute a library's collection has shifted more towards access and not ownership. This infers that libraries now prefer to build a collection of resources that they have access to, and not just what they own. Consequently, libraries have started to shift attention from physical collection to electronic resources that are either curated by the library or made accessible to its users through subscriptions. This forms the foundation of electronic libraries. As noted by Savenije and Grygierczyk (2001), libraries of the future

will mainly function in providing access to electronic sources stored elsewhere. This could be because library users have come to realise the advantage such as ease of access and currency of resources, and have shifted attention to electronic sources of information.

The concept of E-Library

The term e-Library has been variously defined and conceptualized. Brophy (2006) noted that electronic library has also been referred to as "digital library," "virtual library," "online library," and "distance library." These various nomenclatures underscore the several interpretations of what an e-library means to different observers and professionals, and in different contexts. Baro, Eze and Nkanu (2013) captured this by defining an electronic library as "a collection of networked digital information resources and associated technical and managerial infrastructure." Essentially, e-libraries offer some or all of a library's holding in electronic formats, including library services, which are also rendered electronically to enable users have access to them remotely (Anyim, 2018). A related explanation by Hirsh (2014) expounded that e-libraries have the mission to provide information services and resources that are directed towards meeting the needs of faculty and students in terms of teaching, learning and research. These conceptualizations of electronic libraries can be summed through the text of Arora, Trivedi and Kembhavi (2013), which noted that:

Digital library provides library and information resources in electronic format other than print format and enhances searching of electronic collections distributed across networks, rather than merely creating electronic repositories from digitized physical materials. A digital library is a library in which collections are stored in digital formats (as opposed to print, microform, or other media) and accessible by computers. The content may be stored locally, or accessed remotely (Arora, Trivedi and Kembhavi, 2013).

In the current academic library environment in Nigeria, there is a shift in attention from the traditional print resources to electronic resources. Many academic libraries in Nigeria have created a section of their libraries referred to as electronic library (e-library). These sections are usually filled

with computers, but the concept of e-library transcend the stockpiling of computer in a physical space. E-libraries should be understood to include everything that has to do with library resources and services in electronic format. Therefore, libraries in general should be regarded in modern time as a hybrid of electronic and print resources that intertwine and function complimentarily and not separately. The Library and Information Science Network (2016) compiled the benefits of e-libraries in academic environments to include:

- i. E-libraries are the best tool for providing online resources for research which will make easy to its users.
- ii. Retrospective search is easy and most convenient than print resource.
- iii. Literacy is increases when searching made by the educators.
- iv. Searching of index is also easy.
- v. It supports for searching with the combination of keyword.
- vi. While searching made by patrons for their project to retrieve a manageable amount of content, quickly and easily.
- vii. Provision for simultaneous access of multiple file.
- viii. E-libraries facilitate to its patrons for research solution.
- ix. Provision for print out and saved the down load items for future references.
- x. The distance learners are also searching their requirement from e-library.
- xi. E-Library provides the benefit to integrated search to dictionary, encyclopedia, almanacs, and etc. through the reference desk.
- xii. The simplest functionality like Point-and-click promotes the users interest.

Designing E-Libraries for academic environments

In modern sense, e-libraries are integral part of physical libraries, although they are naturally less of physical spaces. In Nigerian context, e-library design often starts as a set of computer workstations that can be used by students and faculty for their computing needs. Computers deployed as part of e-library resources do not necessarily have to be confined into a separate space in the library. Modern library designs favour a hybrid of

traditional and e-library computers co-habiting in the same space. E-library resources and services are essential part of modern library services and not a standalone, separate libraries. However, for some special needs by users, academic libraries could have a group of computers housed in a space within the library.

As learning, teaching and research evolve, it has become evident that complete academic activities require a mix of the traditional print and electronic information resources. Most times, these resources are needed simultaneously and complementarily. Thus, library administrators should find a way to make them available at the same time and place. Nevertheless, most e-library resources and services should be accessible remotely and away from the library. This is the crux of electronic information services. Many students without personal computers or users who are unable to have access to specialized software (such as data analysis software, etc.) are those who should naturally find library computers needful for their academic needs. Therefore, computers provided as part of e-library facilities do not necessarily have to be confined in a cybercafe-like space, but distributed across the library for effective use by the users.

The design of e-libraries should go along with the general library designs. As noted by Head (2016), academic libraries have been working towards a reinvention of library physical spaces since the last two decades. "The traditional carvenous reading rooms and dark warrens separated by stacks of books is incompartmentable with the digital age. The library of today and tomorrow must provide versatile spaces that support a wide range of users' learning and research activities while accommodating rapid advances in Information Technology" (Head, 2016). This evidently shows that libraries can no longer be called libraries without the versatility introduced through electronic library service delivery. Therefore, the design of an academic library in modern era has to be a hybrid of physical and electronic resources which interplay to form what is called a library in the modern sense.

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that designing an e-library should not only focus on a room filled with computers, as seen in many Nigerian universities. It is however desirable for e-library resources and

services to have a central point of access, usually a website. Nowadays, library websites are key to effective delivery of e-library services. In Nigeria, most academic libraries do not promote library website as the key access point to the library electronic resources.

E-library Resources in Academic Libraries

Setting up or incorporating e-library services could be bankrolling. This is because the facilities required to power e-library service may not be owned by the library, thus a need to continually subscribe to access the resources. E-library resources can come with prohibitive financial implications; therefore, an academic library would have to bear this in mind whenever the discussion turns to e-library implementation. Nevertheless, with ingenuity and creativity, several open access tools can be deployed, thereby minimizing cost. E-resources librarians should continually seek knowledge, be up-to-date, and maintain a network of colleagues who keep him informed.

E-library resources ranges from physical infrastructure to non-physical ones. Resources at an academic e-library should include computers and Internet network infrastructure. Establishing a dedicated Internet in the library has become an essential pursuit that libraries should not jettison. Importantly, the library should be one of the places on any academic campus where there is assurance of reliable Internet. Library users have become more sophisticated and now require Internet access now than before. Dedicated Internet for the library could be achieved through direct Internet connection to the library or through shared institutional network. In the latter case, the library administrators should canvass and lobby for dedicated and enhanced share of the Internet for the library. A sound human relation with the Information Technology team of the institution is important to achieve this.

E-library computers are mostly useful to the users who do not have personal computers. The use of these systems often enables students to attend to their assignments, research and learning needs. E-library computers should be equipped with software that are useful for various academic needs, in addition to word processing and presentation packaging software. Where possible, software that offer one-off purchase should be favoured above software that require recurrent payments. The needs of the users should

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guide a library on what to make available for them. Usually, users' needs can be recognized by surveying them; this will guarantee usage of any resource that is deployed in the library. E-library computers also have to be protected with applications that make it impossible for anything to be saved or installed on them. This is important to keep them clean and uninfected with virus. Applications that reset the computers to a preset state once they are switched off (such as Reboot Restore Rx, Deep Freeze, Clean Slate, Rollback Rx, etc.) takes care of such intrusive use by users.

As part of the e-library resources, a local reservoir of e-books that can be accessed without connecting to the Internet could be made available on the computers for use by the users. This may be achieved through the use of e-book management applications, by creating a folder for the e-books on every computer in the e-library, or by connecting to a central local server where the e-books are stored and accessed by other computers via a Local Area Network (LAN). Resources available through CDs and DVDs can also be made accessible through such server-client arrangement.

E-library resources also include databases and online (internet-based) resources that the library subscribes to or are available by Open Access via the Internet. Databases provide access to e-books, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. These are usually the bulk of the resources that make up an e-library. A library is more electronic through the number of resources it provides access to. Such relevant resources (subscribed and openly accessible ones) can be collated on the library website for easy access by the users. In developed countries, subscribed contents are usually made accessible to only the registered users of the library through a single-sign-on function on the library website. This will require every user to be issued an individual login details by the library. In addition, the library website can also feature resources such as the Online Public Access Catalog and the Institutional Repository or archives.

The electronic library services are a model of traditional library services deployed through electronic means. This can include reference services, research supports, literature search, training, specific dissemination of information, current awareness services, and so on. Again, the library

website should be the convergent point for all electronic resources and services. Through such sites, users can chat with librarians or send their inquiries. They can also be linked to social media pages of the library where they will constantly get update about and from the library.

Challenges in setting up an e-library

The primary challenge confronting the establishment of e-libraries in Nigerian academic libraries is funding. E-library resources are usually prohibitive because of the required investment in equipment and subscriptions. In a developing country like Nigeria, subscribing to just one database can exhaust a library's budget for a given year. For this reason, many academic libraries do not subscribe to several databases their users would have needed. Another cogent challenge in establishing e-libraries in Nigeria is manpower shortage. Managing and deploying e-library resources and services often require technological savviness and skills that many libraries do not possess.

This is evident in the management of library websites in Nigeria, whereby most websites are either non-functional or dysfunctional. This can be inferred through the words of Baro, Eze and Nkanu (2013) that "the establishment and commissioning of the e-library in May 2012 at Akwa State, Nigeria, by Governor Godswill Akpabio is a challenge and opportunity for the librarians to see the need for training and retraining to remain effective and relevant to properly utilize the facilities of the e-library." The insufficiency of proficient digital librarians is one of the serious challenges of e-library services in Nigerian academic libraries (Anyim, 2018).

Conclusion and recommendations

Globally, library service delivery has metamorphosed from its traditional form. The use of electronic means to deliver services in the library is also becoming a common in Nigerian academic library environment. Implementing e-library services is thus an integral part of modern library service delivery and not an extended function. Therefore, e-library resources and services have to co-habit with their print and traditional counterparts for effective delivery of information services in libraries. The idea of separating an e-library into a computer-lab format does not resonate with modern library service delivery. This is because it is the traditional library that is

metamorphosing into a digital environment, and not that it is giving birth to e-libraries while still existing separately.

For the dreams and benefits of establishing effective e-libraries in Nigerian academic libraries to be realized, the following recommendations are given:

1. Academic libraries should prioritise the acquisition of electronic information resources and implementation of electronic information services;
2. Libraries and library associations should provide opportunity for training and retraining of librarians towards implementation and management of e-library services in academic libraries;
3. Nigerian academic libraries should now consider implementation of e-library services as an integral and improved version of traditional libraries, and not a separate entity;
4. Nigerian academic libraries should form consortium for acquiring and subscribing to e-resources, in order to cooperatively address the concomitant financial burdens.

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