



Article

AVAILABILITY OF ICT FACILITIES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The study surveyed available ICT facilities and other tools in academic libraries in Anambra State. Questionnaires accompanied with site visits to the institutions were used to collect data. Findings indicate that there is ICT-awareness in all the institutions but that available facility is very poor; only one institution is found to be seriously committed to ICT development in its services. The implication of the poor status of ICT in the institutions was discussed. Relevance of the libraries in providing adequate information resources to support the institutions' objectives is questionable. Libraries in the state may not benefit from consortia being formed in the country. Benefits of ICT in information services are lost to patrons.

Introduction

At the moment there is no clearly defined and well-understood field of information communications technology (ICT). This is because of the universality of information processes, the number of sciences, technologies and disciplines from which it draws and the variety of backgrounds of those concerned with them (Ebijuwa, 2005).

Ebijuwa (2005) defined ICT as tools used for collection, processing, storage, transmission and dissemination of information. To Anyakoha (2005), ICT is the electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information. The American Library Association (ALA (1983) defined information Technology (IT) as the application of computers and other technologies to the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. Computers are used to process and store data, while telecommunications technology provides information communications gadgets, which make it possible for users to access databases and link them with other computer networks at different locations.

Today, there is an exponential growth in knowledge and information. It has been the traditional responsibilities of libraries to collect, organize, preserve and retrieve records of human achievements.

With advances in information and communication technologies, electronic information in the form of electronic books, electronic journals and the Internet has launched the world into an information age. No institution or organization can still rely on only traditional printed information resources to perform effectively and efficiently. To librarians, ICT is a significant development that provides tools for managing the avalanche of information generated by modern society.

Role of ICT in Information Management

ICT provides libraries with capabilities for the location of information, storage and retrieval of information, and dissemination of information. Internet access enables libraries to locate information stored in other computers around the world in the web (websites). With online search facilities, information stored at different locations can be easily retrieved. Through the use of web pages, e-mail and CD- ROM, libraries disseminate information. Digitization of library information resources, which converts print resources into electronic form, information can be accessed from anywhere at homes, offices or any workstation connected to the Internet.

Advantages of ICT

Hinderson (1992) listed the advantages of ICT in library services to include:

- Provision of speedy and easy access to information.
- Provision of remote access to users.
- Provision of round the-clock access to users.
- Access to unlimited information from different sources.
- Provision of flexibility to be used by any individual according to his/her requirements.
- The facility for the reformatting and combination of data from different sources.

Objectives of the Study

The study surveyed availability of ICT facilities and other tools necessary for the provision of e-information services to academic libraries.

This is to provide data on the facilities and highlight status of ICT in academic libraries in Anambra State.

Methodology

Data was collected through site visits to the institutions' questionnaires were used to collect data from the institutions' librarians. In the absence of any institution's librarian, a senior librarian in the library completes the questionnaire. The questionnaires collected data on facilities that aid ICT utilization such as good telecommunication systems, computers, reliable power supply, computer environment (automation). Data were also collected on other tools that were necessary for ICT mediated services such as Internet, telecommunication, websites, library networks, CD-ROM, electronic database (computerized catalogue), E-mail and online searching. Whether a cyber cafe was available on each campus was indicated. The institutions involved were:

1. NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka NAU
2. Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi NAUTH
3. Anambra State University UliASU
4. Madona University Okija MUO
5. St. Paul's University College, Awka SPUC
6. Federal Polytechnic, Oko FPO
7. Federal College of Education (Techn.), Umunze FCE
8. Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe NOCEN

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: ICT equipment/facilities available in academic libraries in Anambra State.

	NAU	NAUTH	ASU	MUO	SPUC	OKO	FCE	NOCEN
Computer	3	23	6	-	-	16	2	2
UPS	3	23	6	-	-	16	2	2
Scanner	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Printer	V	V	V	V	V	V	-	-
Antenna Mast	V	V	V	V	V	V		
VSAT Main Server	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
VSAT Proxy Server	-	V	-	-	-	-	-	-

Satellite Dish	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Reliable Power Supply	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Internet Connectivity	V	V	-	-	-	-	-	-
Websites	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LAN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MAN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WAN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
E-mail	V	V	-	-	-	-	-	-
CD-ROM	V	V		V				V
Telephone Landline	-	-	-	V	-	-	-	-
Telephone Network	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cyber Cafe				-				

Table 1 shows ICT equipment/facilities available in academic libraries in Anambra State. It should be noted that some installations like VSAT server, Antenna Mast are not supposed to be exclusive for library services. The library is supposed to benefit from them when hooked to the Internet or has telephone lines.

ICT FACILITIES

Computer and UPS: Six of the academic libraries have Computers and UPS in their libraries. NAUTH library has the highest number of Computers/UPS (23 systems), Twenty of the computers are in the cyber cafe within the library other 3 are deployed at other units as stand alone systems. FPO has 16 computers 11 of these are deployed in the IT room. The other institutions have these systems for administrative use. Therefore only two of the eight academic library in Anambra State have computers deployed for the information services.

Scanner: Only FPO library has scanners (2). Scanner is one of the basic equipment needed for digitization of documents.

Antenna Mast: Six of the institutions have antenna masts installed at various points on their campuses. These serve as telephone links between the institutions and service providers. Only NAUTPI library with a cyber cafe within the library building and NA with a node from Afrihub to a workstation in the library seem to have benefitted from telephone links. With the mast, municipal area networking (MAN) of the institution can be carried out. If done, people can access information from their offices or workstations outside the library.

VSAT Server: Satellite VSAT is a network infrastructure capable of linking remote sites efficiently and effectively. All the institutions have VSAT equipment at various stages of deployment. The institutions resort to more expensive VSAT communication equipment because of poor telecommunication system in the country. Only NAUTH has a node from the Afrihub for only one workstation, which is not available to patrons. NAUTH has a cyber cafe in the library. Other units in the library are not connected. FPO, IT-centre proxy server is not available. Therefore, but for NAUTH, only traditional print information resources are provided by academic libraries in Anambra State. Surprisingly, some institutions which have Internet facility on the ground do not connect their libraries.

Websites: None of the academic libraries in Anambra State has homepage. This is necessary to enable the library to advertise its product and interact with the global community. Free Internet resources located and held in the library system are posted on the library website for patrons. Library's bibliographic records/database is uploaded to form part of the global resources.

LAN: Only all the systems in the library communicate, and share equipment, like printer. Data can be entered from different units into the central server and shared. This reduces duplication and enhances utilization of library personnel.

MAN: None of the academic libraries has municipal area networking (MAN). Therefore none of the libraries information resources can be accessed outside the four walls of the physical library. The libraries are not automated. Other computers on the campuses cannot access the library's information resources.

WAN: None of the libraries is networked with other libraries in wide area networking. Networking libraries facilitate resource sharing. Libraries must be automated to be able to participate in network arrangements with other libraries. With networking, duplication of efforts is reduced. Indexing and abstracting of newspapers, journals and other publications can be shared among the members of the network. Sharing of e-information resources such as e-books, e-journal with other libraries is made possible through WAN.

E-mail: This is a component of the Internet connectivity. It is used for instant communication. Only NAUTH with a cyber cafe provides e-mail service to its patrons. NAU E-mail is limited.

CD-ROM: All the libraries have CD-ROMs. CD-ROM is latest development in electronic publishing. It is a storage device for many databases. Some books and journals are published in CD-ROM.

Cyber Cafe: This is where a private operator provides Internet services for a fee. All the institutions except MUO have cyber cafes operating on their campuses. NAUTH has a cyber cafe within the library building.

Reliable Power Supply: None of the libraries indicated having reliable power supply. ICT requires 100% electricity supply to function.

Implications of the Findings

From the findings above, no academic library in Anambra State is ICT compliant. Only FPO is visibly working towards automating and providing ICT driven information services. To operate Nigerian libraries without computer technology leaves the country decades behind advances in technology. Some of the implications of lack of ICT facilities in the libraries are considered below.

Internet Facility

According to Ezomo (2006), the Internet is the gateway for libraries and information centres to enter the electronic information era and is providing information generated by different organizations, institutes research centres and individuals all over the world. Some resources available on the Internet include electronic books, electronic

journals, dictionaries, library catalogues, etc. With the general poor funding of libraries, academic libraries in the state cannot exploit electronic information resources in open access (OA) in the Internet. It is a double tragedy as neither new printed resources nor access to current information provided to patrons is available. The libraries may be losing fast their relevance in the academic community. Most students, lecturers, and researchers, aware of what Internet provides, resort at a much greater cost to cyber cafes to satisfy their information needs. The libraries cannot be adjudged to be fulfilling their function of providing adequate information resources to support teaching, learning and research in the institutions.

Consortium Formation by Nigerian Libraries

Academic libraries in Nigeria are forming consortia to facilitate library cooperation in exploiting the available information in the web. Nigerian universities have formed Nigerian Universities Libraries Consortium (NULIC), and Colleges of Education formed Nigeria Colleges of Education Libraries Consortium (NICELIC). The Objectives of the Colleges of Education Consortium include:

- To promote resource sharing among member libraries.
- To make current and relevant information available to members as links are maintained with organizations and agencies worldwide.
- To enhance access of academic libraries serving the Colleges of Education community in Nigeria to global library and information resources (NCCE, 2006).

The major benefit of any consortium is that members share the cost of the provision of access to information thereby reducing cost. Consortium formation is a national programme. Without adequate ICT facilities, academic libraries in Anambra State may have to pay their annual dues without benefiting from the consortia. Already the National Universities Commission (NUC) established the Nigerian Virtual library (<http://nigerianvirtuallibrary.com>), which hosts electronic- books, journals and information resources in many subjects of interest to Nigerian universities. It is very necessary for academic libraries in the country to automate in order to benefit from national ICT-based programmes.

Web Access

Omekwu (2006) observed that Nigerian libraries are mainly without functional web access. The connection ICT platforms to libraries, archives, museums, rural areas and educational institutions are virtually not available. Where institutions lack web access,

the libraries cannot have homepages. Unfortunately, some of the institutions are connected to the Internet with websites but without their libraries having access to the Internet. It could well mean that the websites of such institutions are being used for only admission purposes. It is expected that library homepage should be a component of the institution's website. Libraries are to upload their bibliographic records to become part of global resources and download information as benefits. As none of the libraries in the state has a web presence, no library from the state exists in the virtual environment.

Without Internet facility in the libraries, librarians will not be helpful to their clientele. It is only when they are skilled in the use of the Internet that they can teach other library users how to navigate the web.

Library Services

Generally, the Internet enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of library services. Queries from patrons are handled within the shortest possible time. Reference service which used to be a face-to-face encounter between the patron and the reference librarian has gone digital. Reference librarians can now meet patron's needs irrespective of locations. Eyitayo (2006) listed various types of digital reference services to include;

- E-Mail reference service
- Web forms
- ASKA services
- Chat reference
- We contact Centre
- Video Conferencing
- Voice over Internet protocol (VOIP)
- SMS reference service

With the Internet, poorly funded libraries can have access to freely available online resources. Such open access resources can be downloaded, copied, and printed without cost.

The Internet provides up-to-date information on any-subject. On-going researches findings of earlier researches, are available on the Internet. Newsgroup on any subject can be found on the Internet.

On professional duties, computers are used to automate manual functions. Acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serials control are now automated with many library software available in the market. Online public access catalogue (OPAC) is replacing the card catalogue. All these make information services faster, more efficient and effective. Academic libraries in the state are yet to join other libraries in bringing the benefits of the above advances in information technology to their patrons.

Conclusion

The state of ICT provision in our academic libraries is pitiable. There is awareness of ICT in all the libraries although the available facilities are very poor. With the most important basic facility (electricity supply) lacking in all the institutions, the task of automation is indeed most daunting. Our profession is under serious threat and must rise to tackle whatever problems that militate against the provision of ICT in the libraries. If the business centres on our campuses survive with their cyber cafes, librarians must reappraise how our services are rendered so that they come up to compete under the prevailing environment in order to still remain relevant. Each institution should, as a standard, provide a stand-by generator to supply power whenever the Power Holding Company of Nigeria fails. To sustain the services, appropriate fee should be charged for various services so as to ensure total cost recovery without profit.

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