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Computer as a Tool in Library and Information Centres

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Abstract: This study seeks to find out the advent of computer into the Library and information centres. The application of computers and the impact of computers on Libraries and information centre. Majority of the public libraries in Nigeria perform their operation manually and have no requisite technologies to easily access information resources and services most especially on the interest, on-line data bases and CD Rom data bases and lack of skilled staff in computerization. Computerization has a lot of impact on library and information centres since it helps them to perform better than when their operations manually carried out.

Key words: Information centers, CD Rom, computer library, technology

INTRODUCTION

Library and information centres are concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, studying and consultation. In order for a library to attain this goal, many activities are performed by the library which translates to library and information service.

Adepoju (2001) stated that information is the processed data, which has been converted into more meaningful format and it is the end product of data processing. Information has to be accurate, refined and appropriately packaged, in order to meet the users' needs. It is recorded in various physical formats such as books, Journals, periodicals, microform and computer-held data bases.

The increase in volume of information brought necessity of computerization because the old traditional methods of dissemination of information were no longer adequate and this made scientists to keep on looking for better ways of making information available to the users at the appropriate time. It has become necessary to develop new strategies for the identification, location acquisition, organization and dissemination of these information resources in different physical formats and packages so as to be able to arrest this huge and somewhat uncontrolled knowledge and information for effective usage.

Ajibero (1985) noted that it is vital that all Nigerian libraries exploit every available avenue of delivering information. He added that the might format could help solve a nations problem. And the only method through which such information can be met is through the use of computers which has been identified to be very fast, reliable and accurate in delivering needed information. It is in the light of this that this study was carried out.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARY AUTOMATION

Automation is the application of computers and information technologies to library operations and services most especially in the areas of house keeping such as cataloguing, acquisition, circulations, serial control and reference services. This is to say that those services that were done manually before are now being carried out by machines for effective performance. The use of computer for storage and retrieval of information began in the late 1960's. Many libraries in United States and Britain started to experiment with the use of computer to assist in the processing of information. The first based library system was based on mainframe computers with very small memory and slow speed.

MINI COMPUTERS

Mini computers were developed in 1960s where by the capacity and speed of the mainframe have been improved but the cost was very high. Mini computers are big but smaller than mainframe. It is made possible for more organizations to acquire computers and benefit from their services.

Micro computers also known as personal computers came into being as a result of researches carried out by researches. It appeared on the library scene in the mid-seventies. At first Haney were assumed to be of most use to smaller libraries because of their limited main and auxiliary storage capacities. It was discovered that three computers have the same characteristics. They perform the same job but what distinguished them is that the micro computer memory is small, of a slow speed although relatively cheap. As a result of rapid technology developments and the increased availability of quality

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library applications software, personal computers now provide many new opportunities for library automation neither on their own or as support for larger systems.

In the 80s, as a result of continues development on computers it became more efficient, with bigger memory higher speed, more accurate and cheap. It leads to improvement in resource sharing through networking from local, regional, national to international levels.

Nigeria scene, Ehikhamenon notes that awareness of the need for automation in Nigeria University dates back to the early 1970s. The University of Ibadan issued its first edition of the computer-produced catalogues of serials in the library in 1975. Almost all other universities in the country gave consideration to automation but these University libraries encountered a lot of problems such as lack of fund, lack of qualified manpower, frequent interruption of power supply occasional system failure, negative staff attitude toward computer and inadequate training.

THE APPLICATION OF COMPUTER IN THE LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

The importance of application of computers in the libraries and information centres cannot be over emphasized. In fact librarians have almost never been satisfied with circulation operations. Users are perhaps even less happy. The reason is readily apparent. Our goals of security, accuracy, reliability of inventory, control and speed of services are not achievable by our available resources. Ibidapo (2001) observed that the application of computers to libraries and information activities in Nigeria has been in the areas of Personal Computer (PC) application to library functions, CD-ROM service, Library Networks and Electro-connectivity. Mohammed (2002a) also confirmed that a majority of the libraries in Nigeria and most especially the public libraries have not automated their systems and services. They however have some peripheral such as Telephone, Radio and Television. This shows that libraries and information centres in Nigeria are not left behind in the application of computers in their systems and services in order to meet their users needs at the right time in the right manner.

The application of automation in libraries and information centre especially in this 21st century has become an acceptable norm being the most realistic way and means of providing accurate, timely, effective and effective information and information related services including information management. Automation also makes libraries and information centres smart and offers numerous opportunities to improve services to library patrons. The application of computer technology into the library and information centres has facilitated the collapsing of the barriers of time and location in retrieving information. Application of technology has indeed succeeded in monitoring the world into global village.

The aims and objectives of the computerization of library services are to modernize the entire library system and to ensure accuracy, efficiency, effective information management.

Ajibero observed that where we can store only a few hundred characters per cubic, inch, we can now store billions of character per cubic, inch ... processing has gone from hundreds to billions of instructions per second and parallel procession makes the rate practically limitless. Whoever is given such an opportunity would want to have easy access to such bulk information speedily and accurately.

Lucy (1993) also gave some reasons for application of computers into libraries:

- To manage and process more rapidly, accurately and less expensive. Library processes are found to be clerical in nature and they become sometimes complicated. Errors are committed because of repetitiveness of their tasks. Computer will assist to carry out this repetitive task quickly, accurately and with little expenditure.
- To overcome increasing library load: In the library there are usually needs to introduce new services to meet the users needs and when this is done there will also be an increase in different tasks that are supposed to be done. This is so with the coming of computers.
- To improve on services and to introduce new services such as selective dissemination of information.
- Computer also enables the library to make use of external services. Like library cooperation and library network.
- Library automation is also necessary as a means of forming a common sense particularly when libraries merge.

Mohammed (2002b) observed that due to challenges of public libraries in digital age have no doubt compelled the public libraries to seriously consider the option of applying ICTS in their systems and services as a result of the numerous advantages that could be derive from it.

- The capacity and to increase the speed with which information can be packaged and communicated regardless of the location of the needy/users and the time of need and use.
- The potential to increase the quality and quantity of information that can be acquired, collected, organized, stored, manipulated, transferred, transmitted and retrieved.

- Value added advantage in information distribution dissemination and access in an instantaneous manner and at ease.
- Improved the ability of the information user to use information to account for and justify decision-making, control and supervision, support past actions, predict future events and trends and to support plans and implementation strategies.
- Facilitated the availability of ICT-based-system such as on-line catalogues, OPAC, databases, information services, Internet and networks.

Histle (1996) observed that the massive intrusion of technology into our profession would force changes in the way librarians and staff do their jobs and interact with users and colleagues.

Despite the importance of automation to the library and information centres, there are reasons against the application of computers to information service. These include the fact:

- That the computer does not make everything effortless. It means one have to put in some effort to make it work. The capability of computer is only limited by human being.
- It is not cheaper to share common services, because it involves payment of telephone bills and electricity bill.
- Computer system is not easy to implement and maintain.
- It is not easy to combine individual library system into total integrated system.
- Loss of interpersonal relationship.

However, librarians are therefore exploring the possibility of developing computer-based systems, as it is a huge volume of repetitive operations. A computer should be considered coupled with the fact that automation processes reduce time-consuming clerical routines, provide better and new services and greater control over the collection.

However, from the literature reviewed on this topic, it is clear that library automation increase accuracy, speed, consistency, efficiency, reliable user services and enhanced inter library co-operation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The basic functions of information and communication technologies-based libraries and information centres are: to ensure increased efficiency in library services because of their immense capacity as data processing machine, to support the library operations, policy and managerial decision making and the provision and delivery of information nationally and global wise.

The libraries and information centres in Nigeria are no doubt left behind in computerizing their services and systems. The librarians at State and National levels should as a matter of urgency determine to computerize their services for good productivity as a meet the needs of their clientele towards the growth and development of the nation.

It was recommended that the libraries and information centres should get their systems and services fully computerized. The librarians and information centres managers should acquire the necessary technology to facilitate virtual operations and services.

As no library and information centre is self-sufficient they should involve in global information resources and services sharing capabilities and arrangement. Government should also provide funds for the libraries and information for centres to fully computerize their services.

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