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**Global Best Practices in Cataloguing and Classification in Open and Distance Learning Libraries.**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines global best practices in cataloguing and classification in open and distance learning libraries. The study examined open and distance learning centres and their libraries and the range of library services they provide. It particularly examines the role of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in revolutionising the manner and ease with which library users can search traditional library collections and online sources. The paper also discusses cataloguing and classification best practices in ODL and the level of compliance with those best practices in Nigeria. It also examined challenges to compliance with those best practices and made recommendations for compliance with those best practices. Among the recommendations include that cataloguers need to be proactive when discharging their duties because cataloguing is an intellectual task which always need mental alertness so as to apply cataloguing standards accurately and consistently. To keep up with international standards, cataloguers have to attend workshops, seminars, and other related functions where their skills are to be sharpened.*

**Keywords:** Global best practices, Cataloguing, Classification, Open and Distance Learning.

**INTRODUCTION**

Education training is a strategic tool that societies needs to continuously apply in order to sustain a global competition and advantage, create a better standard of living and development. To this effect distance education has increasingly been used in most parts of the world and in Nigeria as a viable alternative to the conventional education. The success of any distance education depends on the appropriate and effective application and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs). Pena-Bandalaria (2007) noted that appropriate instructional contents are packaged in various formats using different media (ICT) to make ODL instructional package to be delivered in print, audiotapes, videotapes and CD-ROM which makes web-enhanced teaching and learning possible,

using rich online resources to supplement and update instructional materials.

Open and Distance learning is a type of education meant to reach out to all who would not have had the opportunity to be educated, the underprivileged, and can also be seen as a second opportunity for youths who missed higher education in their youthful age. Distance Education plays a vital role in national development of any developing or developed country. Open and distance learning (ODL) has been defined in different ways and at different points in time: According to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), ODL is a learner-oriented system that allows greater flexibility in learning while students continue with their regular work. Onwe (2013) also sees distance education as an education that can provide people that missed educational opportunity at one level or other

an alternative means of recapturing lost educational opportunities characterized by flexibility, low costs, and convenience, without returning to the classroom.

Due to the uniqueness of Open and distance learning and its advancement, which provides for people in need the opportunity for academic and self improvement, Tenebe (2012) opined that except there is mass education of the populace, there will be a time when the uneducated will not allow the educated to be free and exercise their peace. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) on National Policy specified the goals of distance education as follows:

- i. To provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities.
- ii. To meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their workplaces.
- iii. To encourage internationalization, especially of tertiary education curricula.
- iv. To ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

The demand for access to higher education and university education in particular are higher than can be accommodated effectively and the existing institutions are presently operating beyond their capacities. Open and distance learning has the potential to fill the gap and generate new patterns of teaching and learning that can advantageously assist people that needed it which will strongly link with developments in information and communication technologies, it is close to the development of new learning needs and new patterns of information access, application and learning. Chaudhary (2009) noted that the quality of distance education is not a one-time affair; it is to empower the learners by facilitating their learning in a high quality and learner-centered environment.

Owusu-Ansah and Bubuama (2015) opined that the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has revolutionised the manner and ease with which library users can search traditional library collections and CD-ROM. Online sources of

bibliographic and primary information have greatly widened the range of resources libraries offer their end-users.

### **Open and Distance Learning Centres in Nigeria**

Due to this urgent need for ODL, many universities were encouraged to integrate it into their University programme. The National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna was established in 1976 by the Federal Government of Nigeria to produce qualified teachers needed to meet the requirements of the then Universal Primary Education (UPE), providing courses of instruction leading to the development, up-grading, and certification of teachers using distance education techniques. Ojo, and Olakulehin (2006) inferred that NTI offers unique services at their study centres located across the country and also remains a key institute in the production of professional and functional, intermediate and lower level teaching workforce needed for the nation's educational system.

Thus, NTI was the first institution formally established in Nigeria to offer courses via ODL methods. After which, other ODL programmes emerged from different universities. The National Universities Commission, NUC (2015) approved and accredited the following universities for Open and Distance learning programmes thus:

- i. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).
- ii. Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan (UI)
- iii. Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos (UNILAG).
- iv. Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education, University of Abuja (UNIABUJA)
- v. Centre for Distance Learning, University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID)
- vi. Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University(OAU) Ile-Ife.
- vii. Centre for Distance Learning, Modibbo Adama University of Technology (MAUTECH) Yola.
- viii. Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, ( LAUTHECH) Open and Distance Learning Centre Ogbomosh.

- ix. Distance Learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria

All these are offering many programmes that are capable of improving skills capacity building of adult learners. There is evidence that it can lead to innovation in mainstream education, and may even have effects beyond the realm of education itself. ODL shows a two-fold development pattern, on the one hand, single mode open universities have emerged to absorb large numbers of new learners, while, on the other hand, increasing numbers of traditional universities have begun to offer some of their programmes also through distance education.

Many consider the library to be the heart of the university, the use of the library ought to be incorporated into courses being prepared for distance delivery because the central role that library plays in support of the quality of education or in the development of lifelong learning skills cannot be overlooked. Gopakuma and Baradd (2009) inferred that a proactive role and re-engineering of library and information services are required, as the learner is not only separated from the institution but also from the library of that institution. He also added that library professionals agree that distance students are eligible for library services that equal those of the campus-based students.

### ***Open and Distance Learning Libraries and Services***

Open and distance education is synonymous with online access and delivery; similarly, the library services are digital, and the library resources are delivered and retrieved digitally for the convenience of the distance learners. Digital libraries serve as an entity that brings together information resources, facilities, services and trained personnel for proper organization, dissemination, use and preservation of the information resources and knowledge. Most ODL libraries have an information gateway of electronic library for information, which provides OPAC (online catalogue), circulation, reference, information literacy, and current awareness services in addition to training and user orientation. Electronic libraries provide some electronic resources/ databases with link and, which provide

users access to databases such as AGORA, HINARI, EBSCOHOST, DOAJ, OARE, DOAB, SCIENCE DIRECT, VIRTUAL LIBRARY, QUESTIA, EBRARY, NATIONAL VIRTUAL LIBRARY, E-JOURNALS, JSTOR, E-BOOKS, and ACADEMIC JOURNALS among others. With all these made available to the distance learner, the learner is no doubt, equipped for fruitful and effective academic activity. Watson (2006) opined that the provision of quality library services to those who learn from a distance is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and challenging developments that has occurred in contemporary librarianship which has led to the development of specialised library and information services that can appropriately be called distance librarianship.

It is the same factor of distance that redefines and adjusts the name and role of libraries to digital libraries in distance education programme and leads to a specialised information management, named distance librarianship. Watson (2006) stated that in order to provide quality library and information services for distance learning, it is necessary for any institution offering distance education programmes and courses to institute a philosophy that recognises the provision of library services to their students as a primary responsibility of the distance learning institution. Such modalities of special arrangement and provision of online resources and facilities facilitates library services to distance learners.

### ***Cataloguing and Classification Best Practices in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)***

As is already known that cataloguing is the process of creating bibliographic records of works or any library materials/resources according to accepted rules or standard in order to facilitate their identification, location, access and use. Like in other universities, the cataloguing and classification of library materials and resources follow a unique lay down pattern, which many libraries follow and practice. It is almost the same thing with ODL libraries but with slight difference, hence all their resources are online-based. Nwalo (2003) inferred that a building filled with books and other information resources is not necessarily a library unless those books and resources have been

organized for access and made available for use. Most information resources in digital libraries for distance learners are e-resources, e- journals, e-books and database resources, which are more convenient for learners at a distance.

The normal cataloguing practices in most libraries are descriptive cataloguing which is concerned with creating catalogue records for items, describing their characteristics by noting – author, title, and so on and also subject cataloguing which is concerned with classifying the subject matter, the intellectual content of an item. It is the subject cataloguer who assigns an item to a class within a classification scheme which in turn determines a place on the shelf. Recently, the development of highly sophisticated, systematically organized catalogues and cataloguing procedures emerged in this modern library era, which displaced the familiar card catalogues, which is Digital catalogues (called OPACs, Online Public Access Catalogs). Entries in OPACs are commonly encoded in MARC (Machine Readable Cataloguing) format, a standard which permits them to be shared among institutions.

But in digital libraries of Open and Distance Learning, the cataloguers do online cataloguing because they are more concerned with e-books, e- journals, digital and database resources, that can be accessed easily anywhere, anytime through an internet and mobile technology. Levy (2014) opined that this is distinguished from "copy cataloguing," in which the cataloguer makes use of a previously existing catalogue record for the item to create a new record tailored to the needs of their own library. Catalogue records that can be used as sources for copy cataloguing are maintained by several institutions, including the Library of Congress, OCLC. While it may take only a few minutes to catalogue an item, it is not unusual for the original cataloguing of an item to take less than an hour. Classification is a fundamental tool in the process of organizing a collection and in the complementary process of searching for and retrieving information. Cataloguing and classification work hand- in -hand in any working libraries.

The development of new ICTs has enhanced cataloguing and classification of

information resources in ODL. It has also reinforced this trend and strength in order to have a positive impact and an efficient output. A Report to the Carnegie Corporation (2004) stated that as ICT is integrated into the library and its routines, students and other library users will need to be knowledgeable about accessing the information efficiently so that the investment in ICT will be fully utilized.

### ***Challenges to Compliance with Global Best Practices in Cataloguing and Classification***

Expansion of distance education provides new challenges for libraries in delivering services to offsite students. New online resources become available daily and evaluating these resources is essential to providing good library services. Library administrators must have an understanding of how such evaluation should be done and librarians need to know how to evaluate resources and what the best practices are in other libraries. Library staff needs to review best practices for delivery of library services to distance education students and develop plans on how best to serve these students using technology. Online cataloguing of unique collections will add to the world of knowledge. Some challenges that cataloguers encounter in cataloguing electronic resources are as follows:

- i. **Lack of adequate Physical description of some electronic resources:** Electronic resources often do not provide the standard bibliographic information that AACR2 requires, such as author, title, and publication information are most often not available for the cataloguers to work with. On that note Adebayo (2013) opined that electronic resources, particularly those available remotely, often do not contain adequate information for the cataloger to be able to completely describe the item bibliographically. This causes a major setback for cataloguers as they will have to spend more time than necessary on such resources in a bid to find alternative means by which access points can be created for such resources.
- ii. **Inadequate workflow in cataloguing sections:** There is always inadequate workflow which affects the cataloguing of electronic

- resources in libraries, in which acquisitions and cataloguing activities are often performed by same staff. Cataloguing electronic resources requires a great level of mental alertness on the part of cataloguers. Therefore, multi-tasking will not be conducive to the level of concentration required in the cataloguing process. Mitchell (2007) in contrary reported that work redesign is now a part of decision-making and these techniques is to improve or streamline workflow for effective and efficient output in the library operations.
- iii. **Copyright Issues:** Electronic resources, especially those found on the web, need to be handled with caution, Cataloguers would be violating copyright laws by cataloguing such resources and including it in their database without the permission attached to it
  - iv. **Lack of adequate basic infrastructures such as computers, internet, and scanner:** There are some basic infrastructures that must be of assistance for cataloguers for effective discharging of their duty. Lack of computer, internet and scanners for such library activity bring ineffectiveness to cataloguing or electronic resources. Ugah (2007) stressed that infrastructure is the basic framework of any information organization and effective information access and use depends on communication facilities such as telephones, telex, internets and computers as well as other adequate facilities to work with.
  - v. **Lack of basic amenities such as constant and regular electricity supply:** In all activity that works with mobile technology and ICT need constant electricity supply and absence of that brings delay to cataloguing activities. Obidike and Mole (2015) stressed that constant and uninterrupted power supply identified as a strategic measure of enhancing activities in university libraries can be achieved through the help of the government by replacing obsolete power cables and transformers in and around power generating stations that supply electricity to universities and Institutions of higher learning.
  - vi. **Insufficient number of professional cataloguers:** Most librarians don't have interest in cataloguing, and as such some unqualified library staff handles cataloguing of library materials, which brings imperfection. In order to correct such imperfection, cataloguing work will be left in the hand of few qualified professionals, which makes the work bulky and stressful. Eze (2013) opined that libraries obviously do not have enough professionals as required and subsequently, there has been little or no training for the available workers towards acquiring the necessary skills in this regard.
  - vii. **Lack of application of new technology:** Even among some cataloguers, there is no proficiency in some new technology, which enhances the cataloguing work and makes it easier. Pan and Hovde (2010) points out that process of acquiring new information and skills promotes job competencies for performance upgrades and promotion. They also added that competency may reduce job-related stress and increase interest, promoting job satisfaction, professional development as well as life-long learning.
  - viii. **Lack of adequate ICT skills on the part of cataloguers:** There are enormous benefits that are experienced in the impact of ICT in Libraries; academic libraries are also using modern ICTs to automate their core functions such as cataloguing, classification and other general library arrangements. Some ICT skills that make work easy in cataloguing are also needed and absence of those skills draws the activities backward. Haliso (2011) opined that for libraries to function and provide timely information at a faster speed to patrons, libraries have to realise the important role Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play in their job performance and so make it available to their workforce.
- All these can hinder cataloguing practices to the best of the users to access electronic resources for academic use. Oketurji and Iyoro (2009) opined that electronic resources are known to be giving cataloguers problems. They further reiterated that in libraries where they are

catalogued, they are often treated as exceptions and handled quite differently from other materials.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING COMPLIANCE

Classification is a fundamental tool in the process of organizing a collection and in the complementary process of searching for and retrieving information. The best practices for cataloguing and classification of electronic resources in ODL (digital) libraries could be achieved by eliminating those challenges mentioned above for effective and efficient resources organization. Cataloguers need to be proactive when discharging their duties because cataloguing is an intellectual task which always needs mental alertness so as to apply cataloguing standards accurately and consistently. To keep up with international standards, cataloguers have to attend workshops, seminars, and other related functions where their skills are to be sharpened.

Cataloguers also need to engage in centralised and cooperative cataloguing as well as selective and simplified cataloguing practices. These help to save both money time and space and promote standardisation in cataloguing practice.

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