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 Electronic Resource Librarianship and Digital Information in Open and Distance Learning Universities in Nigeria
 

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By

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**ABSTRACT**

*Electronic resources in digital libraries go a long way in the provision of digital information for the benefits of users; especially distance learners. This study examines Open and distance learning; libraries of Open and Distance Learning – digital library. It also points out electronic resources and its kinds as needs and uses for research, academic pursuit and knowledge acquisition. It further examines the challenges that are associated to the utilization of electronic resources to access information; possible strategies and effective situations for accessibility of electronic resources by distance learners were recommended.*

**Keywords:** Open and Distance Learning, Electronic resources/ Information, Librarianship, Distance Learners.

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is the source of enlightenment for any individual, community and government also a foundation of civilization and empowerment. Thus for any country to advance, the education of its citizen should be a target. The population of some countries could make it impossible to use only the conventional system of education to cater for educational needs of its citizenry. This paved way for the establishment of Open and distance learning to improve the educational needs of some individuals that has been denied of earlier educational opportunity.

Open and distance learning as well as distance education can be regarded as a self-paced learning process, which makes it possible for all categories of students to plan their study accordingly to the time at their disposal. Ogunleye (2013) opined that distance education has become globalised, because it has provided for a large number of people in many countries of the world who hitherto had been denied opportunity for formal education to have unlimited access to quality education despite location, time and financial constraints.

And with this, distance education has promoted open learning in such that many people who are

unable to attend full-time studies are now able to access education in their chosen time and place. The South African Institute for Distance Education (2001) defined Open learning as an approach to education which seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to learning, while at the same time provide learners with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system centred on their specific needs and located in multiple areas of learning. Accordingly, it was noted that the concept of open learning was built around the following principles:

- a. Learner centeredness (i.e. the learner is an active participant by providing him with choices and possibilities to enable him develop problem solving skills and competencies
- b. Lifelong learning (i.e. learning should continue throughout life and must be relevant to learner needs and life experiences.
- c. Flexibility in learning through what to learn, how to learn, where to learn and when to learn
- d. Removal of unnecessary barriers to access (e.g.) language, discrimination by race, age, disability, qualifications.

- e. Recognition of prior learning experiences/ competencies which should be accredited for the learner whenever and wherever it is applicable.
- f. Provision of learner's support system in the form of counselling services, access, and communication facilities.
- g. Expectation of success and cost effectiveness. This involves the provision of opportunities for learners to complete learning programmes successfully.

These has made education and learning more available for sustainable individuals and societies.

### **Electronic Resource Librarianship and Digital Information**

Information is a great power for action; lecturers, students and researchers need information from library to support their lectures, studies and research work respectively. These information resources are in form of textbooks, journals, abstracts, indexes, newspapers and magazines, reports and these resources contain the latest and current information in every subject areas with which academic staff and students need to keep themselves abreast with to enhance their job performance and academic pursuit. Libraries in turn take care of these resources, organize, process, store and make it available to users through the proper dissemination channel.

In an ODL Institutions, distance learners need information and resources in the library to argument their studies, in responding to the needs of distance learner to provide online library support, librarians has worked by converting traditional librarianship into virtual / digital environments, so as to customize their services and resources for e-learners for them to access the library resources/ information from any location they found themselves. Kanyengo (2006) opined that scholarly information is increasingly being produced in digital formats and it is attractive to authors, publishers, vendors and libraries for the simple reason that the electronic form has revolutionized the way knowledge is produced and disseminated to the end user, usually in a fast, timely and efficient way. These electronic resources are e-books, e-journals, Databases, CDs/DVDs, e-conference proceedings,

e- reports, e-maps, e-manuscripts, e-theses, e-newspaper and Internet which could be delivered on CD-ROM / DVD, over the Internet and providing access to e-resources which are services to assist distance learners to find e-databases, e-journals, e-magazines, e- books, digital library projects, electronic exhibitions and web search tools on a range of topics and disciplines. Kenchakkanavar (2014) inferred that these electronic resources such as books are helpful because of their easy portability and its feature of incorporating more than one book in a single hand held device and this assist the learners and researchers in getting the information required free of cost and bridge the digital divide.

### **WHAT IS ELECTRONIC RESOURCE?**

Electronic resource is a publication or information encoded in a digital format, which must be stored and accessed through a computerised device such as CD – ROM, computer tapes, computer cards etc. Reitz (2002) defined electronic collections / resources as library materials in digital format, including e-journals, e-books, reference works published online, on CD-ROM, online bibliographic, full-text databases, and other web-based resources. It is pertinent to observe that the great vast of electronic resources enables innovation in teaching, learning and decrease time spent in research and search of information, as well as increase in discovery and creation of new fields of inquiry. Also Ahmad, and Panda (2013) stresses that in this electronic and Internet era with diverse electronic resources users have a number of options to fulfil their information needs and in the same vain very easy for a learner to send a request electronically and have it arrive at the librarians' desk instantly and responded to immediately. These electronic resources enhance the information services of librarians and other service workers.

Kenchakkanavar (2014) opined that electronic resources have different types according to their uses and functions thus:

1. E Books: E- books are many formats competing for prime time, including Adobe PDF, Microsoft reader, E-Reader, etc.

2. E-Journal: An e- journal is very important part of every library collection and is one application of information technology.
  3. E-Newspaper: E- Newspapers is known as online newspaper or web Newspaper that exist on the World Wide Web (www) or internet.
  4. E-Magazines: E-Magazines are one application of information technology, which are among the library collection.
  5. Indexing and Abstracting Databases: These are reference sources which provide bibliographic information about journal including abstracts of the articles.
  6. Full text database: These are e-databases that are organized collection of information of a particular subject or multidisciplinary subject areas, information within E – databases can be searched and retrieved electronically.
  7. Reference database: These are many Dictionaries, Almanacs, and Encyclopaedias, which are available on internet in electronic format.
  8. E-Thesis: These databases are contained with PhD thesis and Dissertation published through e-format.
- a. To get access to an information source by the more than one users.
  - b. E-Resources can be searched quickly.
  - c. These can be found easily by the user.
  - d. These resources can be stored in huge amount.
  - e. Amount of time spent on the E-Resources use.
  - f. Analyses the purpose of using e-resources by respondent
  - g. Know different types of e-resources commonly used by respondents
  - h. To collect, store, organize information in digital form.
  - i. To promote efficient delivery of information economically to all the users.
  - j. To encourage co-operative efforts to save and share the investments in research resources, computing and communication network.

These seem to assist users in several ways for information search, retrieval and use. Librarians are mandatory to provide information for users, but the internet surfing will no longer rest largely on them since users themselves can as well search online with the help of internet links to access information in the web. Gakibayo, Ikoja - odongo and Okello-obura (2013) opined that electronic information usage in libraries is a great shift from print materials to electronic information resources and services in the form of CD-ROMS, e-books, e-databases, electronic journals, electronic current awareness service and information subject gateways, accessed through the internet, which has enabled students to utilize these resources for effective research and of better quality. Anas (2012) also stressed that electronic resources and media has brought a tremendous change in the reading styles of the masses and library users in particular with a strong conviction that electronic resources are becoming more accessible and users would find it more convenient to use at anytime from anywhere.

Distance learners have been at a great advantage over the vast nature of electronic resources and services. They can access information regardless of their location and time. Electronic resources have many functions and

In support of the above, Zhai and Jiang (2013) emphasised that electronic information is vast, new technology has changed the use of Information and Communication in 21<sup>st</sup> Century and librarians have transformed into digital and virtual librarians as well as selects electronic resources to optimize value for their user. Due to the great assistance of the electronic resources to both the librarians and the distance learner, libraries, institutions and media centres are fast in establishing digital libraries, which will in turn lead to both ICT competency / skills acquisition and facilitate the procurement of electronic resources to meet the information needs of their users.

The effectiveness of these electronic resources cannot be over emphasised, hence they enable librarians to provide better services and perfect their work to the benefit of their users and parent community. On this note, Kenchakkanavar (2014) noted some of the needs of electronic resources as follows:

benefits which can be of immense use to distance learners particularly more so in their studies and research. Once a user is connected to the Internet, such user can link up with any part of the world for whatever purpose the user has in mind. But some challenges to the full utilization of those electronic resources by users (distance learners), which could be sorted out and improve on for a better standard of utilization of the electronic resources.

### **Challenges to Electronic Resources Utilization by Distance Learners**

With the development of the times, user's demands for electronic resources and services increase, this requires librarians to keep pace with this tendency. Aramide and Bolarinwa (2010) discussed some challenges confronting the usage of electronic resources as follows.

1. Use of Computer: It seems that there is inadequate computer competency / skills and lack of retrieval skills of electronic resources utilization. Some skills like word processing, database, programming and internet & e-mail surfing, which will enable the staff and patrons full retrieval of resources with ease.
2. Non Subscription and update of databases: Some databases and links are not subscribed to and make available for distance learners, even the subscribed ones are not regularly updated to enable electronic resources to be accessed. This does not give the users the information as they need them.
3. Lack of Finance: Some libraries don't have enough finance to provide ICT facilities to use in the library. These seem to put a lack in the proper utilization of electronic resources.
4. Some individuals don't know what they need to do when they enter the library/e-library at the first time of resumption in the University.
5. There is lack of workable computer that are connected to internet services to boost access and retrieval of electronic resources.

### **Possible Strategies**

With the development of times, library users demand for electronic resources increase that requires more tasks for librarians to keep abreast with new technological skills and facilities in order to serve readers better. Improving in their resources supply and empowering amenities and structures could increase utilization of electronic resources and other internet accessibility. Some of the strategies are as follows:

1. There must be a passion for the use of computer on the part of both the staff and the users to enhance retrieval of electronic resources. This calls for a need for serious strategic interventions to correct the inability to retrieve electronic resources. The Librarians and patrons need training in a wider range of ICT application for them to make full use of technology in utilizing electronic resources.
2. New students should be oriented properly at their first time of their resumption in the University, so as to know the database and the links to retrieve resources with ease.
3. The University Library should have more networked computers highly connected to Internet for browsing.
4. To improve this, there must be an average amount of money allotted mainly for ICT facilities purchase and upgrading, database subscription and renewal, and other electronic resources maintenance and check.

### **CONCLUSION**

Professional librarians with ICT competency skills should be on the lookout when it comes to employment in the library, so as to be eagerly dedicated with the knowledge on how to discharge their duties well. Libraries provide many services to users, which assist them in their academic work. Digital libraries are more equipped with additional e – resources to assist distance learners. These make demand for the provision of more resources electronically for accessibility and utilization, considering their mode of learning. This can help readers and arouse full usage of library

resources in Open and distance learning Institutions and thereby strengthen library functions to serve its patrons better.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Electronic resources have put in great potential and bright future to attract and assist users; it enables patrons to access information and meets up with their needs with ease.

1. It is most encouraged for a good digital environment in libraries for accessing and dissemination of electronic resources.
2. Suitable electronic resources and internet facilities should be made available in libraries to aid accessibility for users.
3. There should be a regular subscription and update of internet connectivity and database links for use.
4. Libraries should be advised to produce locally made software that can be accessed remotely.
5. There should be provision of PCS (Computer) attached with printers for viewing and printing documents from a digital collection.

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