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The Need for Establishment of Virtual Libraries in National Open University Study Centres in the South-East, Nigeria

By

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study is based on the need for the establishment of a virtual library in National Open University study centers in the South – East, Nigeria. All the librarians in the NOUN library in the South- East were selected. The population of the study is 8. The case study questionnaire was used to collect data. The data collected was analyzed using mean (X) statistics to determine the level of acceptance or disagreement of items in questionnaire. The findings includes that there is a need for the establishment of virtual library National Open University of Nigeria. More so it was found that there are advantages of virtual library and it also agrees that there are challenges encountered in the establishment of the Virtual library. Possible solutions were suggested which could be used in tackling these challenges. The Virtual library is an ICT department fit for the present boom in the information world. Even though the traditional library has a say as far information storage is concerned, it cannot be compared with the virtual library which promises higher services to render and a vast community of user to serve at the same time.*

**Key Words:** Virtual Library

**INTRODUCTION**

A library is a store house or an institution whose primary aim is to collect, organize and disseminate information materials to clients. These library collections involve manuscript, books and newspapers. Library could also be in an electronic formats such as CD ROMS, Diskettes, disc drives, Video, recordings, micro fiche. The basic functions of any library irrespective of type is to produce right materials (resources in all journals) to meet the information needs of users. University librarians major objectives is to serve to students and researchers at any level, therefore librarians must be ready to acquire and make available necessary databases for teaching and research in university communities. The students need information for their research while lectures need information for collection of any research. Meanwhile the collection of any library including university libraries cannot hold everything the users need. In view of this internet connectivity was introduced into the university libraries to counteract the partial resources for students use for learning and research project (Akpan, 2001).

Library, irrespective of its quantity collections, cannot accommodate all resources from all dimensions to serve every user with various needs their request within its building. That is one of the reasons internet is needed to complement in its effort to neither assemble information not found in the library building. Indeed, internet has greatly improved in finding dissemination.

Internet is a nature of linked computed which are located at different ponds all over the world that provide easy communications between persons and organization no matter where they are located. The internet is used mostly in obtaining information and globally help in sharing information ideas experience with other libraries Tamaro, (2012) as cited in Zhou, (2005). There are various resources of internet such as world wide web (www), Electronic mail (E-mail), Electronic journals (E-journals), Electronic books (E-books). There are various type of libraries such as University Library. Academic library, Special Library, Private Library, Public Library and others but our focus of this study is on virtual library.

The term virtual library had often been used interchangeably with digital library. According to Wikipedia, the digital library is referred to as an electronic library in which collections are stored in electronic formats for example CD-ROMS, flash drives, SD cards among others (as opposed to prints materials) and are used through the computer. Virtual library is a library on the internet and has many books called electronic books (E-bookss). Some of these resources can be viewed on the World Wide Web (WWW) while some can be downloaded. Virtual library does not have physical existence such as books, DVDS, or other physical media. It has only computers with internet which are used to access resources through remote access online databases. Virtual library can also be referred as internet based digital library or a library without walls. The content of a virtual library is that any person who has a computer and connection to the library networks can access not only the resources of that library but also a variety of information available through natural and inter-natural networks like internets and without being physically presence in library.

Virtual libraries enhance searching capabilities in a digital format file library resources are available at the user's desktop, regardless where the user is physically located it provides the user with the ability to download and manipulate text for literature review and so on. In addition, virtual library could be viewed as one of the sources of material needed during research, and it is provided by the internet. It is exhaustively used by scholars and researchers. (Daniel, 2002). He further asserts that virtual libraries bring together the resources of various libraries and information services in one place for easy accessibility.

The need for the establishment of a virtual library cannot be over emphasized. Apart from the fact that virtual library would improve learning it also is an avenue for reaching out to a wider society. Several efforts have been made to see that virtual libraries are created in universities. Traditional libraries operate with designated hours, virtual libraries are available at anytime and anywhere there is internet connection "A paradigms shift takes place from libraries as facilitators of access to all kinds of information provided by anybody located anywhere in the world is accessible at any time. Grothkipf, (2001), opined that the ability of a variety of information resource hassled too many scholars to deserve it as an experience of virtual reality-a computer simulated environment with which the user can interact realistically and become totally immersed with the aid a virtual reality technology. The user enjoys the earphone of being in a distant library outside his/her own environment without physical movement and the emphasis is on accessibility as opposed to ownership of information.

The National Open University of Nigeria and its library was established as an instrument for National Development and was reflected in the National Policy of Education(FRN 2004) thus,

the legal instrument establishing the National Open University Act of July 22, 1983 was suspended in 1984. Its actualization started in 2001 by its resuscitation given birth to the National Open University of Nigeria. The primary objective of establishing National Open University of Nigeria is to give equal opportunity to those who could not go to conventional University, thus, helps the individual to develop from this point onward to attain what he or she had hitherto thought was unattainable.

The major difference between students in National Open University of Nigeria and others in the conventional universities therefore is the mode of instruction. The nature of studies in National Open University of Nigeria are not the same with conventional University in Nigeria which run full time and residence campus studies, unlike National Open University that run part time –weekend studies, off campus studies. Their students are mainly civil servants, traders and matured old citizens who desired to read, the motto is “work and learn”. However, these noble objectives of the NOUN that involve research, teaching and learning activities could only be achieved if their libraries are well equipped with library resources for effective library service delivery which in turn will simplify research, teaching and learning processes. For libraries to perform these roles smoothly, effectively, efficiently and in accordance with users’ needs within and outside the buildings they have to store the library collection readily available and properly used. The task of providing library information to the academic community in tertiary institutions like the National Open University of Nigeria has been the mandate the library has had to perform over the years. There are about or more than seventy-eight (78) study centers in Nigeria. In light of above, there is tremendous need for the establishment of virtual library NOUN. Fundamentally, this will help to inter-connect all study center libraries so to provide and use available resources for library services delivery to their users. Unfortunately, there is no interconnectivity of study center library in NOUN. It is fundamental because the libraries are regarded as the heart of their parent institutions and they are also recognized as the medium through which NOUN can achieve their set objectives. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) library has several stocks of printed and electronic resources, the electronic resources from e- library. The library’s collection has grown to 60,000 volumes of books and 1,500,000 volumes of electronic resources. It also has growing periodical and audio-visual collections. Hence, this research was focused on the need for the establishment of virtual libraries in National Open University study centers in the South-East.

## **REVIEWED OF RELATED LITERATURE**

In this era of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the modern world is undergoing a fundamental transformation as the industrial society of the twentieth century rapidly gives way to the information society of the twenty-first century. This dynamic process promises a fundamental change in all aspects of our lives, including knowledge dissemination, social interaction business practices, political engagement, media education, health leisure and entertainment. Libraries are essential lives in this communication between the past, present and future. Libraries provide people with answers to the information they need to write, play, learn and govern. Whether the information or cultural record is contained in boxes or in electronic formats, libraries ensure that the record is preserved and made available for later use. Most academic libraries are linked to other libraries in

cooperative networks enabling them to share scarce and little-used materials required for admired research. Therefore, since a rapid transformation is being in place for various sectors why not for the library advancing in to a permanent virtual library remotely accessed by everyone Dahl, (2006).

The terms digital library and virtual library imply a library that provides access to a collection of distributed information in electronics format through pointers remotely or a collection of digital objects hooked in the same place, virtual or physical. The virtual or digital library have many familiar library features but there will be a change in the way in which the library acquires and provides access to collection and the composition and roles of the library staff. Many libraries had heard that by the year 2000 all new resources would be digital. Although we have not quite reached that point today rather most libraries are still collecting and organizing both print and electronic resources (Kaliyammal & Selvi, 2004).

A virtual library refers also as a collection of full text E-books, journals and databases from various publishers and sources which can be accessed at any time from any internet connected computer, laptop or any other portable device. A virtual library is a collection of stockpiled information using a single interface or entry point. The fundamental point is that the user needs not to know where a particular resources are located that's why virtual library is sometimes referred to as "a ghost library. A virtual library could be used to provide users with library and information services by electronic means with network document delivery and access as it from a real Library but without physical entity actually being necessary (Harrod's Library Glossary).

### ***Concept of National Open University of Nigeria Library***

Academic libraries such as National Open University of Nigeria libraries are established to provide resources that convey information for preservation and information resources which are vital for the education, including the visually impaired persons. According to Edoke (2009), the entire human and material resources in the library are put in place at considerable expense for the overall purpose of providing effective services to the academic libraries.

### ***Advantages of Virtual Library***

The virtual library has numbers benefits. There are many benefits of virtual library given out by Granthen (2007) and Gunn (2002) are as follows: immediate access to resources, information updated immediately, no physical boundless, support different learning styles, accessible for the disabled, present students work, inform retrieval, teaching tool for informing literacy, storage of information, networking capabilities, direct studies to relevant resources

### ***The Perceived Challenges of Establishing Virtual Library***

Looking at the perceived challenges of establishing virtual libraries in universities provides opportunities of cost effective access to a board range of information resources in the global village or various purpose including National Development and Intend relations. It is a means of bridging the digital dandle being experienced by the National Development and International Relations. The Nigerian Libraries face the challenge of leapfrogging and the information and knowledge age which the global community funds itself through the provision of virtual library services. The successful implementation of the virtual library livings on same value including

developed information technology and a conducive environment (Salawu 2010). He further avers some problems in the establishment of valid libraries to be: - Authentication and Authorization, the shift of influence over biographic refuses, ownership and licensing, implementation and management, new knowledge and skill, power Supply, electronic Cataloging, financial Impact, preservation and conservation. However, authentication and authorization stood out as the basic problems that Nigerian libraries are alerting both for local and remote users.

A database of internet resource description that is made accessible through a structural and unstructured network service is sometimes used synonymously with 'portal' or 'gateway' (Irokwe, 2001) A web-based catalogue should provide several level access to: books, journals letter volume and issues, table of contents article texts. Online cataloging requires knowledge and ability to use online tools. In the words of Irokwe, (2001), catalogue input is the web design is necessary for effective web enter take and a page-linking structure that facilitate effective use.

The National Open University has come to realization of the fact that traditional library hold a lot of flaps which is not so in the case as a virtual library. The virtual library is a new development in the Nigerian Society unlike developed nations like united states were is usage has being in use for decades. This is caused by the sluggish implementation of information and communication technology in the Nigerian system. National Open University has seen the need of the new development and here decided to key into virtual library owing to the fact that previous development lacked adequate man power, poor storage, retrieval sluggishness, transportation means (library not close to the researchers residence) and so on which is not so using virtual library this is because the information needed is provided within seconds and remotely accessed from any location all over the world within the snap of the fingers. Though the virtual library seem to be more important than traditional library but still it has running's. This study is therefore meant to highlight the need for the establishment of virtual library in National Open University of Nigeria.

### ***Purpose of the study:***

The main aim of the study is to determine the necessity for the establishment of a virtual library in National Open University of Nigeria study centers in the South – East. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the need for the establishment of virtual library in NOUN.
2. Find out the advantages of the establishment of virtual library in NOUN.
3. Determine problems encountered in the establishment of virtual library in NOUN.
4. Strategies for improvement in the establishment of virtual library in NOUN.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What is the need for the establishment of a virtual library in NOUN?
2. What are the advantages of establishing a virtual library in NOUN?
3. What are the challenges to the establishment of a virtual library in NOUN?
4. What are the strategies for improvement in the establishment of Virtual Library?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in five study centres in the South-East. The study centres used for the study are Enugu study Centre, Awka study centre, Owerri study centre, Umudike study centre and Abakiliki study Centre. The population of the study computed all the librarians in the five study centres of NOUN in the South-East. There are eight (8) librarians that made up these centres. No sampling technique was used for this study because the population is small and can equally be handled by the researcher.

The instrument for data collection is the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, the first part entails the Bio-data sections and the second part was questions. The questionnaire was made of 20 questionnaire elements. Two facilitators and one lecturer in measurement and evaluations from Awka study Centre established content validity of the instrument, the research questions and the structure of the items. Their suggestions guided in the production of the study.

The researcher administrated eight (8) copies of the questionnaire to the respondent and it was collected immediately because the questions were clear and straight to the point and the number administered were very small. The method used in the data analysis was mean. The research question was analyzed using mean and the result presented in a tabular form. Value were assigned to the four response categories as follows-strongly agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, strongly disagree (SD) =2 and Disagree (D) =1. The measurement of the mean being that 2.5 and above is positive while 2.49 and below is negative.

**Research Question I:** What is the need for the establishment of a virtual library in NOUN?

**Table1:** Needs for establishment a virtual library in NOUN.

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1.	The unavailability of information has hampered the standard of education	3.38	Accepted
2.	Information learning will be fostered by the virtual library	2.75	Accepted
3.	Virtual Library gives access to all kinds of information	3.38	Accepted
4.	A constant information source is a great advantage to the learning community	3.63	Accepted
5.	Time spent in searching for information on the web will be relieved.	2.88	Accepted

From the result of the table all the items were accepted. Although items 1, 3 and 4 were highly accepted having a mean of 3.38, 3.38 and 3.36. Then item 2 and 5 was accepted having the mean 2.75 and 2.88 respectively. This means that there is a need for the establishment of a virtual library in NOUN study centers.

**Research Question 2:** What are the advantages of a virtual library?

**Table 2:** The advantages of a virtual library.

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	A Virtual Library will enhance education performance among students	3.63	Accepted
2	The establishment of a Virtual. Library will increase the quality & quantity of information accessible to users	3.63	Accepted
3	The establishment of a Virtual Library will ease the drudgery in the traditional library operation	3.25	Accepted
4	The virtual would contain up to date information.	3.63	Accepted
5	The virtual library can be customized for particular scholar or user community.	2.63	Accepted

The analysis of this table (2) as regard the benefits of the virtual library indicates total acceptance by the librarians. They agreed that virtual library will be of great benefits to both the students and the university community at large.

**Research Question 3:** What are the challenges encountered in the establishment of a virtual library?

**Table 3:** Challenges of Virtual library

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Power supply	3.88	Accepted
2	Lack of skilled Personnel	3.36	Accepted
3	Finance	3.75	Accepted
4	Electronic Cataloging	3.25	Accepted
5	Management and Maintenance	3.25	Accepted

From the **table 3**, the total mean score of the perceived challenges were above the cut of mean to indicate acceptance. All the respondents accepted that all the research elements are a challenge to the establishment of a virtual library.

**Research Question 4:** What are the possible solutions to these challenges?

**Table 4:** Solutions to the challenges listed above

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Provision standby power supply	3.88	Accepted
2	Organization training exercise for librarian	4.0	Accepted
3	Provision of finance by both the government and from internal revenue	3.75	Accepted
4	By acquiring software which makes it easy for electronic cataloguing	3.88	Accepted
5	By efficient management and maintenance	3.63	Accepted

In table 4, the result indicates that the suggestion of the Solution made was accepted by the librarians. Hence 2 shows 100% acceptance from the respondents.

### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

1. The researcher observed that there is a great need for the establishment of a virtual library since the librarians also agree to the fact that a virtual library highly needed in University and for the social community.
2. The researcher observed also that there is a benefit in establishing a virtual library.
3. These benefits include availability of up to date information, increased quality and quantity of information acceptable to user, enhancement of educational performance amongst students, Provision of stand by data connection, Provision of adequate computers among other
4. There are challenges to the establishment of a virtual library. These challenges involved implementation and management of knowledge and skill, inadequate power supply, inadequate fund, electronic cataloging.
5. Possible solutions to these challenges were made and they include: provision of standby power supply, organization of training exercise for librarians, provision of finance both by the government and through internal revenue, among others.

### CONCLUSION

In view of the findings of the study, it was concluded that the existence and establishment of a virtual libraries will enhance learning, and be of immense advantage to the National Open University of Nigeria and other University libraries at large. If the reverse is the case of having inexperienced personnel, inadequate power supply, and unavailability of a virtual library in University libraries, leads to destruction of the standard of education. Hence, there is a great need for the establishment of a virtual library in National Open University Study Centers (NOUN).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made -:

1. The University should put plans for the establishment of a virtual library. A feasibility study should be carried out to ascertain what exactly will be needed for this task.
2. The federal and state government needs to be valued when any university seeks for fund and the university management should judiciously manage any fund provided by the government.
3. All hands included the staff must be on deck and ready to work and learn when the opportunity calls for it. And not only to learn but to implement what they have learnt when the need arises.

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