Public Libraries and the Librarians : Making A Difference In Information And Communication Technology (ICT) Era
BY
Abdurrahman Jibril

Abstract
The paper examined the concept of public libraries and public libraries in Nigeria, roles of public libraries in Nigeria, collection development of public libraries and categories of resources in public libraries. The paper also defined the concept of public librarian and his roles. It further discussed the concept of information and communication technology (ICT) and ICT era, the knowledge, skills, facilities and services expected by public libraries and librarians in the deployment of ICT. The paper identified the factors militating against the use of ICT facilities in public libraries; recommendations on the way forward was given and paper concludes that public libraries must reflect the changes brought by ICT in all it operations and public librarian must be skilled on the use of ICT to be able to serve members of the community efficiently.

Introduction
Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized almost all aspects of library and information services from clerical work to the core work of library and information services selection, acquisition, processing, storage, conservation, preservation, and dissemination of information. The services rendered with the help of ICTs are more effective and faster. As a result of these advancements, there is need for library staff to acquire skills that will enable them to operate and cope with the trend. Ugwuanyi (2009) stressed that the present day librarians are expected to be skilled in using computer, networking and the internet to fulfill their professional obligations. The activities which were carried out manually in libraries with so much pain and strain are being carried out smoothly with the help of ICTs with greater effectiveness. Public libraries are not exempted from the impact of ICTs; such libraries are very much interested in incorporating the latest ICTs in their technical works and user services. ICTs facilities should be installed in public libraries to generate a digital information environment for the provision of better services to the general public irrespective of tribe, religion, race, sex, disabilities as well.

Public Library
By "public libraries" one is referring to those libraries established by the government which is expected to serve all kinds of people including young children and people with disabilities, in fact even people who for one reason or the other are incapacitated. Such people include patients in the hospitals, prisoners; they are generally managed, financed and supported by governments, local communities and occasionally by non-governmental organizations, etc. However, some national libraries in Africa, develop, operate and maintain public libraries (Aina 2004).

Public Library in Nigeria
One of the earliest types of libraries in Africa is the public library which was highly influenced by the colonial masters. For instance, the British Council pioneered the development of public libraries in Africa (Aina, 2004). Nnaji (1986) stressed that before 1946, the only libraries of importance were in Lagos. The Lagos public library, jointly owned by the Lagos Town council and the British replaced the Lagos library (Usman, 2012). Towards the end of the year 1950s, the federal government association (WALA) founded a federal library advisory committee "to advise the Federal and Regional Governments and Government of Southern Cameroon on library and bibliographical policy and problems (Nnaji, 1986). The committee, together with successive British Council librarians, had pulled forward different proposal for a national library service. The crash education programme which worked out with some degree of success, created a favorable climate for library development in Nigeria. Public libraries are founded wholly with government grants in the developing countries which Nigeria is one in agreement with the UNESCO public library manifesto (1972) which states that:

> *A public library should be maintained by public funds, and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services. To fulfill us purposes, the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, religion, language, status, sex, educational attainment.*

This UNESCO public library manifesto remain hitherto the most authoritative government statement on the provision of libraries to Nigerian communities. It is therefore essential that public libraries should be established in our communities.

Roles of Public Libraries in Nigeria
The public library have a role to play to ensure the realization of national development in Nigeria, this is because, the mission of every is to provide timely, accurate, current, and reliable information to their users include the following:

a. Provision of information sources for continuing education, vocational education and adult education, thereby facilitating informal education of all interested in informal education.
b. Meeting the information needs of all individuals in the community irrespective of race, colour, disability, age, religion, language, status, sex, educational attainment.
c. Provision of free service to all. The library should be free; no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services because it is maintained by public funds.
d. Provision of library and information services to all, whether in urban or rural areas. The library should provide its users with library services like current awareness services, selective dissemination of information referral services, orientation services, and many others which help them make best use of the library.
e. Provision of rental facilities to members of the public, such as a hall for events like wedding receptions, lectures, seminars, conference, symposia, and also rooms for meetings etc. to members of the community where it is cited.
f. A public library also serves as one of the important facet in an overall guidance programme. That is, the public library will inculcate in the users some good moral ways of life that would help them to survive in the society.
g. It helps members of the community to study independently by providing a wide of range information resources for school assignments, personal reports and school projects.

Thus, the primary objective of public libraries is to serve the wide spectrum of its users. Other objectives are concerned with the development of reading skills, literacy programmes on the use of books and libraries, provides extension services as well. To achieve this, a good library resource is a most.

Collection Development of Public Libraries
In order to serve the wide spectrum of its users effectively, the collection of a public library are as varied as all the items that can be collected by any type of library. The collection development policy should satisfy the needs and interests of every member of the community. These materials should be categorized into:
a. Print materials: The public library print resources consist of books, reference books, fiction, pictures, journals, magazines, newspapers, projects, theses etc. Public libraries acquire, store and preserve a variety of print information resources for their users.
b. Non-print materials: Non-print materials: These are information resources other than print

materials. They are the equivalent of a printed text that can be recorded on a sound recording, video recording or transparent media bearing images in a reduced form. They include sound cassette, tape reel, gramophone records, video recordings, microfilm, and microfiche. All these media can be used to provide information that can be heard, seen and heard
c. Digital/electronic media: these are media in which information is represented in electronic form. Examples are computer files, diskettes, compact disks which are used by the public library to serve all members of the community irrespective of any differences., that is they produce sound as well as images with video for the spectrum of its users.

The Public Librarian
The public librarian is a professional who acquire, organize, promote, and disseminates a wide range of information resources to meet the diverse needs of the community. It support independent learning and provides a wide range of information on business, the community, careers, learning and recreation. A public librarian is proficient in the use of ICT as part of the role involves assisting the public in accessing the internet and other web-based services. They may also spend time talking to and building up relationship with members of the public and assisting with specific learning needs or community groups.

Roles of Public Librarian
Public librarian as a professional that specializes in acquiring, organizing, promoting and disseminating a wide range of information resources to meet the diverse needs of the community have the following roles:
a. Anticipating community needs and trends to ensure library resources are used as much as possible.
b. Promoting the use of library through display, talks and community events, this may involve work in the library or going out into the community.
c. Keeping up to date with newly released publications in order to select library resources.
d. Organizing library provision for specific community groups such as minority ethnic groups, schools youth organizations, adult learners and pre-school groups.
e. Undertaking reader development activities which may or may not be directed at a specific group.
f. Developing the use of ICT to improve service delivery.
g. Dealing with enquiries and assisting library users in accessing ICT and other resources.

h. Stock maintenance, including weeding out of old resources.

Public Libraries and the Librarians in Information and Community Technology ICT Era

Different authors have defined information and communication technology (ICT). Aina (2004) defined it as an omnibus term that combines computer and telecommunications technology, it is concerned with the technology used in handling, acquiring, processing, storing and disseminating information. It is also seen by Oketunji (2002) as the application of computer and communication technology to information handling. Lucy (1987) defined it as the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information by micro electronic based combination of computing and telecommunication. UNESCO (2000) defines ICT as the techniques used in information handling and processing. The concept information and communication technology (ICT) could be put together to mean the new media tools applied to information service delivery which encompasses to collect, organize, retrieve, disseminate and preserve information. Information and communication technology thus serve as the power to help individual and societies achieve greater access to knowledge and ideas.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Era

Information and communication technology era may not be easily and precisely defined; however, it may be described as a period brought about as a result of advancement in science and technology, whereby computers and telecommunication technology are used massively as a factor in all activities that contributes to the acquisition, processing, storing, display, and transmission of information for the development of the community or society (Haruna, 2009). Information and communication technology era is also a period in which all sorts of transactions in our society is done electronically, online where by fundamentally modifying the way people think and work, thereby revolutionized our ways of lives leading the world to a "global village".

The Public Librarian in ICT Era

(a) One major function of every librarian in any type of library is to manage both human and material resources in that particular library he finds himself. The adaptation of ICT in public libraries mandated the public librarian to be versatile in three categories of skills: technical skills, managerial skills and ICT skills. (Haruna ,2009). In addition, Nonthacumjune (2011) listed personal skills generic skills and discipline-specific

skills as the three required skills expected by new generation of Library and information science professionals in this 21st century. This is due to the simple fact that ICT having revolutionized various aspects of library services from selection, acquisition, storage, processing, and dissemination of information which subsequently changes in skills required by professional librarians. Sharp (2004) posits that given the current situation where ICT are being continuously introduced thereby replacing or supplementing traditional formats with digital format which necessitated the continuous and regular training of librarians. Gbaje and Ukachi (2011) posit that the most crucial element in effective information service delivery in digital work environment is having the right staff with appropriate technology skills in place.

The public librarian should be able to include in his selection various materials relating to ICT, for example "fundamentals of computer", "the use of computer in the digital age", "ICT at a glance" "certification of computer literacy", "introduction to computer" etc. The public librarian should be able to render useful advice to various members of the community that patronize the library on the importance and need in ICT facilities available in the public library.

(b) **The Public Libraries in ICT Era**

The application of ICT has resulted in the globalization of knowledge resources. Public libraries in developing countries may not have ICT available to them. In the midst of a global information revolution, many public libraries still use methods that date back to a much earlier era. The extent of ICT application in public libraries in Nigeria is still largely unknown. Therefore, the need for ICT in library operations and services such as selection, acquisition, cataloguing and classification, circulation, management of serials, reference services etc are paramount. Such ICTs include computers, internet, electronic mail (E-mail), CD-ROM, (compact disk read only memory), World Wide Web (www) etc. In addition to the available audio visual materials. Shibanda (2000) stressed that if libraries fail to embrace this wave of great technological development world wide, they may well sink themselves by it. Okolo (2002) observes that libraries need ICT in order to give sufficient services to its users.

Public libraries must identify itself with this era, by so doing it will ensure sustainability; therefore, public libraries must explore and exploit the potentials of ICT in practices and services in order to become relevant in this global village.

Members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, religion, language, status, sex, educational attainment would enjoy the following services in a digitalized library environment as follows:

i. The Internet: The internet is an important product of information and communication technology which is a collection of vast information sources interlinked computers networks and the information sources in each computer are made available to all users who have access to the internet. The most important facilities on the internet are the World Wide Web, which is a popular service of information exchange from the internet. It supports, the storage and retrieval of information, it is necessary to have a web browser. Public libraries must provide internet service so that members of the community can make the best use of it in this ICT era.

ii. Electronic Mail: The electronic mail (E-mail) is one of the important applications of the internet which allows the exchange of text messages between users globally. The E-mail service is fast and efficient way to exchange information among millions of users in the world. Thus, users in the community with e-mail address can send and receive messages on the internet from anywhere in the world regardless of the distance. As such, public libraries have to provide this type of electronic media for the interests of members of the community.

iii. Chart : This is another useful interactive media on the internet which enable members of the community to have "live chart" on any subject on the internet. In public library, users can get answers to their questions with follow up questions in an interactive manner instantly with the public librarian. Thus, this service will help the librarian to provide reference service to the members of the community and at the end serve the users with the right information. This can be facilitated through social networking like face book, twitter, whattapp, BBM charts,

iv. **Usenet News Groups:** This is another interactive media on the internet which is a Usenet group like public notice board on the internet. Public libraries can use it to serve as an avenue of informing members of the community about the incoming events, resources into the library so that users can make the best use of it, in other words it can be served as a way of informing users about the incoming materials into the library in form of Current Awareness Services to the users.

v. **Live Conversation (Talk Session):** This is an interactive communication in an online conversation, while in talk sessions, the computer screen splits into halves forming two windows, one window displays the character being sent while the other shows the one being received (Mohammed, 2007). Members of the community can use live conversation in the public library for learning, leisure, or any other personal purpose.

It is important to emphasis here that for the members of the community to be able to have access to information stored in the computer and ICT related devices; they must know how to use it. Jordan (2003) said that barriers to adequate ICT skills arise as a result of non-integration of ICT in the curriculum of our school education system. The National Policy on Education (2011) has incorporated computer education in the new curriculum of our education system (9-3-4) so that students can be able to make the best use of ICTs in this digital era.

Factors Militating Against the Use of ICT In Public Libraries

The use of ICT in public libraries is faced with a lot of constraints such as:

i. Instability of light and lack of alternative power supply.
ii. Inadequate ICT infrastructures in the public libraries.
iii. Inadequate funds.
iv. Lack of adequate skilled public librarian to operate the available ICTs.
v. Lack of adequate support from the government in governance.
vi. The problem of diversion of equipment.
vii. High level of illiteracy on manipulation of IT gadgets among the members of the community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

All libraries this digital era should reflect the changes brought about by ICT in al its operations and services. Librarians as information professionals should be equal to the task by going for training and retraining to acquire the necessary knowledge and

skills to handle these ICT facilities. The public libraries must be versatile in information technology so that they can link the diverse information available locally and abroad to the members of the community. In view of this, the following recommendation are made:

    a. Information and communication technology gadgets should be sufficiently supplied to the public libraries.

    b. Adequate finance should be provided for the procurement and maintenance of ICT facilities in the public libraries.

    c. There should be in-service training programme for the public librarians so that they will acquire the necessary skills in the use of information technology appliances.

    d. The government of the day should support the public libraries through the procurement and maintenance of ICT equipment

    e. Computer education should be inculcated into the curriculum of our schools right from primary up to tertiary institutions.

References

Aina, L.O. (2004): Library and Information Science Text for Africa. Third World Information Services, Ltd Ibadan. Nigeria.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012) National Policy on Education Review, Abuja.

Gbaje , E.S, and Ukachi, N.B.(2012). Assessment of Technological Skills Competency of Academic Librarians in Nigeria .Journal of Nigerian Library Association Retrieved on 28/03/2013 from http://.NLA.org

Haruna, Z. (2009): Application of Information and Communication Technology in Public Libraries in Kaduna State Unpublished project submitted to the department of Library and Information Science,A.B.U. Zaria.

Jordan, E. (2003) Library Skills in the Tertiary Environment in Service Education for Librarians in Developing Countries. Australian Library Journal.

Lucy, T. ((1987): Management of Information System. London. D.P. Publication.

Nonthacumjane, P. (2011). Key Skills and Competencies of a New Generation of Library and Information Science Professionals. A Paper Presented at the Conference of International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Okelunji, I. (2002). Application of Information Technology in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. Paper Presented at the 10th Biennial Conference of the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE).

Okolo, E.O. (2002). The use of Library for Students in Tertiary Institutions. Ibadan. ed time Publishing.

Shibanda, G.C. (2000) Managing and Strategizing Africa's Information in Global Computerization, Journal of Library Achieved and Information Science.

Ugwuaniyi, C. (2009): Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy among Academic Librarians in Enugu State. A Paper Presentation at the 2008

Professional Seminar of the Nnamdi Azikwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

UNESCO (2000) International Education. Parks: UNESCO House.

UNESCO and Ifla (1994) UNESCO Public Library Manifesto. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestors/librarian.html

http://www.prospect.a.uk/public_librarian_job_descrption.html. retrieved 23/07/2013.