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MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES IN DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: RESOURCES ON LEARNERS' PALM

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Abstract
Mobile technology has actually provided faster access to information and communication libraries services enhancement for distance learners. Mobile library services to distance learning students have a great impact. This study examines the mobile library services in distance learning institutions, emphasizing the use of those mobile services to promote service delivery in libraries, especially those for distance learners. It also identifies the different distance learning universities in Nigeria. The study discussed on the digital technologies and its services to learners to access library resources. It also, examined the promotion of service delivery via technologies and its benefits, as it includes: eradication of paperwork, greater output and accuracy. The study discussed on the mobile services in digital libraries and their core services such as: current awareness services, information packaging, selective dissemination of information and information referral services. Benefits of mobile services were discussed such as: time saving, limitless access, ability to access information and mobile library database, among others. Challenges of mobile library services and possible enhancing strategies were discussed. Suggestions that will assist learners to actively use those technologies to access resources were discussed.
Keywords: *Mobile library services, Distance learning, Resources, Learner's palm, Nigeria*

Introduction

Distance learning is very vital, as it provides needed access for citizens who are disadvantaged and cannot have opportunity of conventional education system, distance education is really an alternative. That is why Igwe (2023) in his opinion states that open and distance learning is helping individuals to cope with

the rapidly increasing demands of education, also expanding the provision of education to the needed citizenry. As the name implies, it is a system of teaching and learning where the student is separated from the instructor by physical distance, but often bridged by communication technologies. Distance learning is often described as the formalized learning received while the student is on a location outside the university campus (Nwezeh, 2010). It has the potential and capacity to provide general education and professional education using mobile ICT devices/facilities. It is a pre-packaged text, audio, and video courses taken by a remote learner with restricted or no interaction with an instructor. But recently new information technologies and internet connectivity have bridged, which allows and enrich interactively with learners, irrespective of their location. Open and distance education can also be regarded as a self-paced learning process which makes it possible for all categories of individuals to plan their study according to the time at their pace (Ogunleye, 2013).

Since distance learning is a type of learning whereby individuals, who have passed the ages of admission into regular Universities are being given added advantage to be educated, in spite of their location and business they do. Now distance learning is not only for old people, rather it is universal, for everybody that are privileged to meet up with past denied educational opportunity and are qualified to enrol, since there should be no barrier for enrolment into tertiary institutions, hence open and distance learning is involved. As a matter of fact, for distance Education goal to be achieved, there should be a streamlined plan with proper steps, which should be followed to achieve such goals for the concerned learners to benefit. In Distance Education, there must be physical separation between the learner and the instructor but to achieve a more effective learning, there must be a structured decentralized learner's support services for instance in Open university of Nigeria, there is what they call E-Ticketing, where learners can be attended to both physically and virtually. Henning (2010) added that DL applies a set of methods or processes for teaching a diverse range of students located at different places and physically separated from the learning institution, their instructors as well as other students.

In Nigeria, distance learning is a vital opportunity for empowering people, it has generated tremendous excitement both inside and outside higher education. It provides learning to new audiences and offers the opportunity to transform learning delivery. With this good start and approach to educational development, a good number of virtual online universities that started growing over years continued to grow for the benefit of both the learners and the society. Nigeria had its first distance education programme at the University of Lagos. This was the

correspondence and open studies programme commenced in 1974. Since then, several distance learning programmes have sprang up in Nigerian universities (Jimoh, 2013). The most full-fledged and prominent of them all is the National Open University that operates in a high proficient single mode (DL) and the eight other federal universities in Nigeria that had interest in the running of dual mode (face – to -face and DL) of the programme in their various universities approved by NUC, including: Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife; Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos, Akoka; Distance Learning Centre, ABU, Zaria; Centre for Distance and e-Learning, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan; Centre for Distance Learning, University of Maiduguri; Centre for Distance Learning, Modibbo Adama, University of Technology Yola,; Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education, University of Abuja (NUC,2018). Ayo, Odukoya and Azetah (2014) opined that the quality of instruction delivery and operational tools have been the major concern to ensure total benefit and value of ODL.

Digital Technology: Resources on Learners Palm

Because of the uniqueness of distance learning system, all its activities are structured for the benefit of the learner. There are some characteristics that make both the instruction, library and resources suit for the learners use, information and communication technology cannot be far from this, it has gone a long way to rejuvenate all the ODL activities for a justifiable learning outcome. Information in the changing roles of academic libraries has a particular reference to the requirement of distance learners. The required standard for learners is digital library with online features to accommodate the needs of the learners that learn at a distance. Digital libraries have to successfully acquire and promote their online resources, to enable accessibility from any location and time. The findings of Suresh (2019) opine that information technology has played an important role in library and information science and also enhance digital Library, which is a special library with a focused collection of digital objects that can include text, visual material, audio material, video material, stored in electronic formats. The managerial planning should cover its services in a way that they meet the information and resource needs of the learners wherever they are located and enhance information /resource dissemination, retrieval and use for their academic pursuit.

Everything connected to open and distance education is virtually online delivery and for the benefit of the distance learners, the library must be digital, its resources, facilities and services are made virtual also for easy dissemination and

retrieval. Digital libraries serve as an entity that brings together information and its facilities, collections, services and trained personnel for proper organization, dissemination, use and preservation of useable information, resources and knowledge (information management). Suresh (2019) also states that due to the developments in information technology, it is possible for libraries to provide several new/online services to the library users, which provided an avenue for the provision of information in print form as well as in digital form. In view of this, Trivedi (2010) also opines that a digital library is a library really dedicated to be useful to learners, which collections are stored in digital formats and accessible by computers, at any place, any time and one's convenience.

The content may be stored either locally or accessed remotely. The Digital Services from the library has become a favourite issue with the end users, getting the required information in no time just with the click of a mouse has brought a revolutionary progress in the area of Library and Information Sciences of 21st century. The main focus of the mobile service is to get the right information at the right time to the right users in the right format at the right place (Bhattacharya, 2022). Its availability is of vital importance for enriching the libraries for digital information provision, dissemination and use. Ijeoma and Agwu (2015) outlined the components of digital library among others as: a variety of systems; database servers to handle remote requests; local or distant database servers; organized library system for serving groups of individuals. There are needs for distance learners to acquire new ICT skills to use these technologies to retrieve needed information. Digital Libraries and ICT have grown immensely to assist students through online retrieval services (OPAC) for information dissemination, retrieval and use. Owusu – Ansah and Bubuama (2015) avert that online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has revolutionized with ease in which distance learners can search traditional library collections and CD-ROM and online sources of information have greatly widened the range of resources libraries offer their end-users.

With the availability of digital libraries, internet accessibility and other technological facilities, there is the possibility of providing access links to electronic resources that increases the information needs satisfaction by distance learners. Electronic resources are those information resources that are in a digital format and can only be accessed through the technology devices. The resources are of great value hence distance learners can on their own access information in virtual form. Konappa (2014) opined that electronic resources represent an increasingly important component of the collection building activities of libraries and are those materials that require computer access remotely via the internet or

locally. Such electronic resources available in the libraries are thus: e- books, e-journals, CD – ROM, e- patent, e- newspaper, OPAC, e- database, electronic theses and database among others. Quadri (2012) pointed out that many types of library materials such as journals, books, patents, newspapers, standards, photographs, pictures, motion pictures or music are now available in electronic or digital form and hold many advantages such as time and place convenience, timeliness, ability to search directly, ability to link to further reading material and ability to disseminate and share information, which promote services in libraries.

Promotion of Service Delivery Via Technology

Technologies are effective tools that improve learning, reading and dissemination, information technology has changed the way information is processed, stored disseminated and use; it has effectively put back the traditional approaches to the library and its services and changed entirely all activities in the library to digital services. With this, libraries and librarians would have to play a crucial role in handling digitized electronic resources and as such both the librarians and the patrons would have to inculcate the best skills of discharging their duties well and retrieval of needed information respectively. Mobile technology has actually provided faster access to information, communication and learning, at the same time challenging libraries as well to rethink and remodel their service by adopting technological changes (Shehu, 2019). These also encourage storage and retrieval of information through electronic communications media, with a variety of formats for the learners' academic pursuit.

Mobile technologies are seen as an effective tool in improving communication, teaching and learning, which seems to increase the learners' flexibility access to information and resources academically, they could work independently of available resources not being mindful of library personnel and possessed ICT skill. Bucki (2017) inferred that mobile device refers to a variety of facilities that allow people to access data and information from wherever they are such as cell phones and other portable devices. He also emphasised that, information could be transmitted from one medium to another without the use of cable connection, but referring to devices that allow individuals to access information irrespective of their location. It allows people to transport files over a network or a wireless connection via a mobile device. In this vein, mobile computing offers a lot of benefits including *connectivity*, anytime at your convenience, which can benefit learners to access information for their academic work and vice versa. These benefits are:

Eradication of Paperwork: Mobile devices effectively eliminate paperwork as they collect store and transfer data electronically. Some mobility solutions such as barcode scanners and mobile printer can assist distance learners to totally eradicate the burden of manual activities like that of printing. Distance learners can search and access for needed information quickly and accurately, instead of carrying piles of paper information.

Greater Output with minimal time frames: Mobile computing devices offer improved and faster search and access to information. This avails distance learners the opportunity to access the needed information with ease.

Limited/No Cost: Mobile technology offers more mechanised means to access information, such as access to bulletin news, and information without encoring expenses, especially students that are decentralised, they can always be communicated to with ease through such devices.

Greater Accuracy: Mobile solutions through transfer of information electronically, allows information to be speedy and accurate, it avoids interpretation errors that are commonly seen in the manual data entry process. Information gotten through that will be valued more because of its assurance of accuracy.

Mobile Services in Digital Libraries

Digital Libraries offer varieties of services through mobile services for the benefit of distance learners, mostly prospective students are encouraged and advised to acquaint themselves with the services available in the library to access information for their academic work. These services are always available for learners are:

Access to Information: Information to students on electronic access services, alerting services, search services, reference services, browsing services, lending services, inter-library loan services especially distance learners that are not centrally located. Other services could be either of these like information packaging; current awareness services; book mobile services; information referral services and selective dissemination of information, in different formats such as services to e- database, e- journals, e- newsletter, CD – ROM, e- patron records and their links to access information via mobile device.

Benefits of Mobile Library Services to Distance Learners

The library is an essential unit of any university, which plays a significant role in achieving the mission and vision of that particular university. The services of libraries in any citadel of higher learning cannot be overlooked, as it provides a unique feature that can be of value to all. The digital library is provided on the basis of quality of access for all users and there must be an agreed standard of services made available to learners for optimum use of information. When a unique strategy is developed in learning which enhances the advancement of educational materials and its availability to the masses through mobile phone anytime, any day, anywhere, such strategy could be regarded as mobile learning ((Oguchinalu and Sunday, 2015). In the same vein Alqahtani and Mohammad (2015) stated that Internet-enabled mobile devices can help students to access learning resources and online courses, anywhere and at any time.

These services need to be supported by e-mail addresses and fax numbers allowing service to learners in hours convenient to them. Virtual libraries in the internet became more comprehensive and are utilized where possible by instructors, digital library for distance learners using web-based e-learning platform bring together the e-resources of various libraries and information services, both internal and external, all in one place. So, users can find what they need quickly and easily. This will create a virtual library where all academic institutions can share e-resources, services and ideas. Libraries can provide wide range of services through mobile device for the benefit of distance learners. Sharma and Sahoo (2014) identified some of the benefits of Mobile library services in information access and retrieval such as:

Time Saving: Mobile services assist users to browse and search for library resources without long waiting and waste of time.

Limitless Access: Online information / resources are readily available to all distance learners through mobile device and services at any time and place.

Personalised Service: Mobile library service grant quick access for distance learners to interact with library professionals and obtain reference services to suit their needs.

User Individual Participation: Any distance learner can have access personally to any needed electronic resources like OPAC, e – database, e- journals, CD-ROM, e-

Newspapers as the need arises.

Ability to Access Information: At any point in time distance learner can access needed information through a required links with the assistance of a mobile device.

Interactive Capacity: Distance learners have opportunity of interacting with the librarian anytime, anywhere, irrespective of the location through online interactive videos.

Neupane (2012) also identified some services that libraries can provide to users through mobile devices and they include: News and Events Mobile Online Publics Access Catalog Mobile Library Instruction Mobile Library Databases Short Message Service Notifications SMS reference Webcam to check congestion on library.

In all of these benefits of mobile technologies for service delivery and information retrieval in the libraries, there are certain challenges that hinder the effective and efficient use of those devices.

Challenges of Mobile Library Services to Distance Learning Students

Some of the challenges that normally hinder effective mobile library services to learners are as follows:

- Lack of Finance.
- Out–dated resources and non-availability of relevant resources.
- Lack of internet facilities especially in the remote areas.
- Non-Subscription of databases and links for information access.
- Lack of awareness among students.
- Lack of Competent skills by distance Learners.
- Lack of ICT qualified staff to guide the learners.
- Lack of Motivation to the learners.
- Poor information Literacy/ User education skills.
- Lack of proper communication channels between the learners and library staff.
- Firewall, blocking access.
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Enhancing Strategies for Mobile Service Delivery to Learners

In as much as there are pending challenges of mobile library services to distance learners, there are still way to cub it and come out of it and strengthen the effectiveness of the services to the full benefit of distance learners, they are:

- Funds for the upkeep of library and maintenance.

- Improvement in technological proficiency, both on distance learners and library staff.
- Bridge of gap between traditional students and distance learners learning experience.
- Ensuring level of access to resources by distance learners, with the use of various communication.
- Provision of user education through online guides, tutorial and interactive videos.
- Provision of more relevant e- resources that is compatible with mobile devices available.
- Provision of virtual reference enquiry services for the benefit of distance learners.

Conclusion

The information gap among the decentralized learners at different locations can be bridged by the effective mobile library services, which has to be available to them through online resources via mobile devices and services for their use. The place of mobile services within libraries is highly recognised and its potential for supporting distance learners. It is therefore important that distance learning students are furnished with links to databases which will enable them to access institution library resources in a timely and convenient way. Furthermore, efforts should be made through library orientations, to provide valid instructions on how to access these resources, because students must be made aware of these support services if they are to fully benefit from them.

Suggestions/Way forward

In the light of the above conclusion, the following suggestions could be considered:

- Intensive efforts should be made by the library management of the ODL Universities to provide instruction on how to use the library and access electronic resources to enhance learning.
- Facilitators should also be encouraged to give assignments that would require the use of information sources in both print and electronic form; this would encourage the students to consult reference sources in addition to their modules to complete their assignments as to develop their skills.
- There should be functional libraries in all the centers with stock of current materials and links to online resources relevant to the information needs of the learners.

- Training of librarians and distance learners in the field of ICT should be given priority.
- Funds for staff training and development in the universities should not be tampered with and should be released promptly when the need arises.

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