

COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF E-BOOKS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

by

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Abstract

Nigerian literature has focused more on the general concept of e-resources without dedicated attention to e-books. This work takes a critical look at the challenges related to e-books collection and management in Nigerian universities. The study was conducted among six federal universities in Nigeria; one from each geopolitical zone of the federation. A survey research design was utilized to carry out the study with structured interview conducted for system librarians of the six university libraries. While there is proliferation of e-books in the libraries, absence of local titles, budgeting, consortium and awareness of DRM issues remain obvious challenges.

Keywords: E-book management, Nigeria, University libraries, Collection Development, DRM.

Introduction

The evolution of library as a centre for gathering, organization and dissemination of information has taken an interesting dimension ever since the advent of the Sumerians who developed tablets on which cuneiform signs were inscribed to record official, religious and financial transactions. This vital role has continued to be the focal point of library routine activities despite the avalanche of various formats of information storage. In academic institutions, the role becomes more apparent as the library is seen as a corollary of academic excellence and information driven research. As crucial as the role of library is, the

ingenious input of collection development section holds the ace for an efficient library users' service. In that wise, a carefully designed policy formulation and implementation is necessary for a purposeful collection development. Haliso and Aina (2012) advocate for quality service in the area of collection of current, relevant and adequate print and electronic information resources to achieve a standard that suits the needs of the users. While collection development policy in the print book section of the library has attained the status of a well acculturated duty in the library, the same cannot be said about e-book collection. This evolving but important segment is still attempting to attain a platform that can engender stability even in the developed world. However, the challenges are more pronounced in developing nations due to their peculiar inadequacies. Sambo, Abu-udenyi, Urhefe and Yakubu (2014) posit that absence of e-book collection development policy, selection criteria, and planning and evaluation committees remain the bane of e-resources acquisition in Nigeria. Yet, this segment of the book trade swells in volumes on daily basis as a result of ever increasing embrace the e-resources enjoy in both the developed and developing worlds. The preponderance of e-resources can better be appreciated when they are made readily available for accessibility to the library users. In Nigeria, the academic community has become familiar with e-resources revolution in recent time, even though one may not be able to determine the level of attention devoted to e-book as a specific and special area of the e-resources collection. Since the country is an integral part of the global academic arena, it is not disputable that happenings around the world will definitely impact on the nation. The level of social and economic development issues is paramount to industrial growth of any nation. Attainment of the duo are unarguably anchored on the outcome of rigorous and enduring scientific researches which are products of current and valuable information; the vital service coordinated in the library as a complement of educational and research institutions. In recent times, the process has further been eased due to availability of e-resources in general and e-books in particular, giving room for copying and pasting, and transfer of information materials to colleagues anywhere in the globe.

Statement of Problem

Even though there has been a gradual acceptance of e-resources as alternative information sources in Nigeria, a phenomenon which Gani (2014) describes as a recent development in Nigerian libraries, it is pertinent to note that Nigerian literature has focused more on the general concept of e-resources without a dedicated attention to e-books as a special element within this compound hub. Challenges such as identified with packaged subscription to databases, poor electricity, shortfall in technical expertise and software/hardware complements have been the focus of Nigerian authors assessing the e-resources arena. While highlighting the issues in implementation of e-book usage in Nigerian school libraries, Yaya (2015) acknowledges the numerous advantages of e-books. Even though he names initial huge fund needed for the takeoff as a challenge, the research work did not examine issues around e-book as information resources. Allen and Kaddu (2014) discover that majority of libraries (73%) that responded to their questionnaire were academic libraries with both school and public libraries having no response due to non-availability of e-books. This work attempts to take a critical look at the challenges related to e-books as library materials and their collection in the library in the same way collection issues relating to print books are professionally examined in the university library system and literature.

Significance of Study

In recent time, Nigerian academic libraries are getting more interested in collection of e-resources for the usage of the patrons. While the academic community has become accustomed to the use of e-journals, a different scenario plays out with regards to e-book acquisition and usage. In as much as it is important to situate the users in this event, it is significant to note that a perfect understanding of the delicacies involved in provision of e-books by the librarians themselves will assist at placing e-book services on an enviable pedestal for optima usage by the users. This research work serves the purpose of being a guide to Collection Development Librarians and their counterparts in the ICT section of the

library to continuously experiment with various modules and options available in the e-books arena with a view to finally formulating an acceptable collection development policy for Nigerian university libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept and Evolution of E-book

Literature search has shown that there exists no single and collectively acceptable definition for eBook. Armstrong (2008) considers e-book to be “any content that is recognizably book-like, regardless of size, origin or composition, but excluding serial publications, made available electronically for reference or reading on any device (handheld or desk-bound) that includes a screen”. Vassileiou and Rowley (2008) posit that: ‘(1) an e-book is a digital object with textual and/or other content, which arises as a result of integrating the familiar concept of a book with features that can be provided in an electronic environment’. In a project coordinated by Portico, the consensus among stakeholders comprising of six scholarly publishers and three commercial eBook aggregators defined e-book as inclusive of ‘e-only monographs, monographs appearing both in print and online, digitized print titles, and continuously updated reference databases’. They however took exception to inclusion of audio books, whereas, eleven libraries and a consortium considered an e-book to comprise of ‘e-only monographs, monographs appearing both in print and online, digitized print titles (including objects digitized by the library), and continuously updated reference databases’. But they considered audio books technically speaking to be e-books even though they are not within the scope of their collection (Tracy, 2008). Also Doiron (2011) while describing e-books says that they are considered as the digital version of printed books, as well as those books primarily written for publication in the electronic section of the book trade.

Various accounts are awash with the history of the emergence of e-books. Tedd (2005) posits that the evolution of e-book was part of emerging e-publishing that started in the 1960s, while Wikipedia

considers that the invention of e-books occurred in 1971 by a student of the University of Illinois called Michael Hart, who later found Project Gutenberg, which happens to be the first and largest collection of free e-books available online. However, the first commercial e-book according to Canadian Association of Research Libraries (2008) was launched by Random House in 1981, but Schell (2010) contends that e-books debuted in academic libraries in the 1990s. Since then, the phenomenon has become gradually integrated into the system of information generation, organization as well as its accessibility to the varying library patrons. The benefits inherent in this format cannot be overemphasized due to a variety of opportunities this modern technology provides for the academic community. Today, multiple platforms have been opened for those who may be too engaged to attend the regular academic courses as full-time students. It is usual to front load course materials to students enrolled for these shortened courses in preparation for few weeks of intensive coaching. Melcher (2015) affirms that e-book will be of real benefit to such distant students in this era of Open University education as well as students who harbour preference for digital information resources. Such preference might not be unconnected with the ease of citation in the cause of a research. Besides, Maceviciute, Borg, Kuzminiene and Konrad (2014) define other germane advantages of the introduction of e-book in the library to include: the unlimited simultaneous access by multiple readers, saving of the space in storage, making texts easily transportable by users and from one library to another.

Issues on Accessibility to EBook

It has however been noted by Library Journal (2012) that the largest categories of e-books acquired by academic libraries in the United States remain non-circulating reference materials and scholarly monographs. This, it contends, might be attributable to budget allocation which has taken a downward nosedive. Conversely, Melcher (2015) shares the opinion that in the face of ever shrinking budget, there is still a great deal of commitment towards providing e-resources in academic libraries. The increasingly

growing appetite for e-book especially in the US and other western countries must have accounted for this level of commitment even with scarce fund.

There is a suggestion that there isn't as much enthusiasm in relation to appreciation with regards to usage of e-books in Nigeria. In the same vein, Yaya (2015) captures this when he stated:

Moreover, in Nigeria the exact percentage of e-books reading populace has not been ascertained but the percentage might be drastically low even among the intellectual populace; reasons for this could range from high poverty and illiteracy rate in our country to lack of adequate awareness of these e-books devices among the general populace.

He further highlights a fundamental gap when he affirms:

It was also discovered that in Nigeria, Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure is poorly developed. This needs to be urgently addressed so as to facilitate the smooth running of e-books and other e-journals in our schools.

Library Journal (2010) says that even though e-books have been around for decades, but it was able to corner a significant market space recently due primarily to introduction of 'next-generation eBook readers' such as Amazon Kindle, the Sony Reader, the Barnes & Noble Nook- devices which have created convenience and comfort-ability while retaining relative low expense. Accessibility remains an important denominator of an efficient service delivery in any corporate institution involved in information management, the academic library inclusive. It is the criteria with which patrons would judge the usefulness of the library towards attaining their information needs at any given time. Barrage of reasons may constitute an impediment to achievement of this singular most significant essence of an academic library. With reference to e-books, provision of e-book readers could have been introduced to serve noble courses, but the challenges that have accompanied the devices call for concerns.

Damast (2010) contends that one of the major obstacles in the path of e-book reader has been the difficulties encountered in the process of its usage. He further elaborated on this when he alleges that a pilot project coordinated by Amazon saw the distribution of e-readers to students of seven different

universities as a form of replacement for heavy text books was bedeviled by these challenges. Sharing a similar experience, Behler (2009) observes that a similar attempt was made at Penn State University Libraries during the 2008/2009 academic session when a donation of 100 Sony eBook readers were made available to test run a Pilot program, though a high level of success was recorded, the shortcomings manifested in its inability to adequately cater for students with learning and visual impairments. Unsatisfactory battery life and difficulty of recharging, slow refresh time when turning pages, glare on the page, and an expensive purchase price were common place. These are key issues to an academic library that must be properly addressed in a bid to bring patrons closer to embracing this new technology and take the most appropriate and informed decision in choosing the best software/hardware for the use of the library and its numerous clients. Furthermore, different companies who produced these readers have adopted incompatible models that place limitations and restrictions in varying degrees on the performance of the devices. Melcher (2015) affirms that non standardization has been a major impediment to the usage of e-book as the different systems adopted by varying publishers do not work across platforms.

Another disturbing phenomenon is the issue of licensing and Digital Rights Management technology. According to Rice (2013), e-book licensing has a variety of models which can be categorized to several groupings including print, database and Open Access licensing arrangements. Print model vendors are known to use digital rights management technology that put a level of restriction on access and usage in the area of printing, copying, pasting and saving of the e-book content. In this age of campaign for open access to information as a fundamental right, restrictions would only serve a negative tendency against promotion of e-book. Consequently, Melcher (2015) believes that difficulty of accessibility and reference for print materials could be obstacles to clients' usage of e-book. This will definitely result into partial introduction of faculty and students to the new technology. He further states that digital rights management technology most times serves as inhibitor to the use of e-books due to restrictions placed

on such publications, thus being a disincentive to probable users of these digital materials. Another study (CARL, 2008) states further that a major difference between e-books and e-journals is that most e-book distributors protect their e-books with DRM. O'Connell (2013) therefore advocates for instructional training for clients on use of e-books in the library in view of the fact that patrons can sometimes experience some frustration when searching for e-books, simply because our collection is still growing, and because a large percentage of our titles are usually checked out.

E-resources/e-books collection and management in Nigerian university libraries

Ridwan (2015) notes that digital sources will go a long way in assisting research works of Nigerian authors to gain global visibility and citation anywhere in the universe. Ukonu, Wogu and Obayi (2012) consider low network, difficulty encountered in the process of accessing e-books due to lack of subscription, coupled with inability to secure access to online books as part of the challenges militating against the use of the digital library by degree students of UNN. Also, Nwegbu, Echezona and Obijiofo (2011) recommend resource sharing as a formidable strategy to enhance quality service among academic libraries in this era of digital information resources. They advocate for monitoring of library consortium by National Universities Commission (NUC), Federal Ministry of Education or National Library of Nigeria, while all academic libraries take it upon themselves to computerize their various libraries to stimulate the flow of information resource sharing option in the face of shrinking budget of the university libraries. Gani (2014) analyses the management of e-libraries in northwest Nigerian universities and finds that the e-libraries have online databases, e-journals and e-books as the available e-resources even though he observes that there were deficiencies in the areas of infrastructure as well as information technology literacy among staff.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Methodology

This study was conducted among six federal universities in Nigeria. With one from each geo political zone of the federation, the selection gave a fair representation of the various regions of the country: University of Benin representing the South-South; University of Nigeria Nnsuka from South East; University of Ibadan in the South West;; University of Jos in North Central; Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto for North West and University of Maiduguri in the North East. A survey research design was utilized to carry out the research. A structured interview was conducted for six System Librarians in the university libraries, which was further transcribed before being analyzed to answer the research questions with regards to issues in collection and management of e-books in academic libraries.

Result and Analysis

Regularity of e-books acquisition in Nigerian academic library

Responses indicate that none of the respondents agreed that his library was involved in a deliberate effort to acquire e-books on the basis of individual titles. This was attributable to various reasons which show the non-popularity of e-books usage both among students and the faculty who constitute the users of e-resources in academic environment in contrast to the use of other e-resources among graduate students and faculties in the various libraries. Consequently, the interviewees said they subscribe to databases rather than purchase out-rightly individual eBook titles. A respondent aptly summarized this when he said: 'we actually do not acquire e-books on the basis of selected titles; we get them when we subscribe to various databases both fee-paying and Open source'. Even then, three of them (50%) said they subscribe to fee paying databases when accreditation of academic programmes by National Universities Commission is at hand, while all the six (100%) patronize open access platforms regularly. Thus, the university libraries are constantly on packaged database made available by e-resource providers after due registration.

Highlight of some budget related issues in the process of eBook acquisition

The six interviewees (100%) were evasive in providing answer to this pertinent question, rather what all of them did was to generalize the answer by making allusion to the prevailing cash crunch as well as the usual budget challenges faced by Nigerian university libraries. Responses such as: 'we work around our available budget allocation with regards to acquisition of e-resources' was a common answer. They however affirmed that the University Librarians were always ready to ensure subscription to electronic databases especially during the period of accreditation exercise. Here, there is a semblance of commitment to provision of funds for e-book acquisition in line with the findings of Melcher (2015). It could be deduced from their responses however, that they exercise no autonomy on the fund with respect to the needs of the virtual library.

Budget distribution ratio between print/eBooks

None of the interviewees (0%) indicated a clear distribution ratio between budget allocation to print and electronic books; the only one (16.6%) who attempted to answer the question was not specific. He gave an impression that there is no special ratio adhered to when deciding what eBooks take in relation to its print version. Rather, funds are allotted to each of these main items based on prevailing needs of the library at a given time. He however acknowledged the domineering attention received by print books; a suggestion shared by other interviewees. This is an indication of either an absence of collection development policy for e-materials or failure to adhere strictly to the provision of such policy.

The role of Faculty in eBook selection process

During the course of the interview, the six System Librarians (100%) engaged acknowledged that the faculty plays virtually little or no role in selection of e-resources in the library. This was attributed to the status of the form of electronic materials sourced by the libraries; packaged databases which gives no room for faculty participation in the selection process. They also averred that 'phobia' for e-books by many academic staff and reluctance of the Nigerian indigenous publishers to embark on creation of e-components for titles with local authors might be the disincentives that militate against involvement of scholars in the academic community and their near neglect from being carried along in the process of

selecting e-resources for academic libraries in Nigeria. The library staffs are the only participants in this onerous task, unlike what is obtainable in collection of the printed book materials.

Involvement of library users in eBook selection

Two out of the six interviewees (33.3%) said that some of the library clients sometimes make suggestions as to new available open access journals online. But when asked to be precise on electronic books, they all agreed that clients do not play any role especially that the library does not purchase individual titles in the electronic format. Titles owned by the libraries are e-components that sometimes accompany certain print books. It can therefore be said that library users have little influence on the activities of the Nigerian university libraries in the selection of eBooks.

Acquisition of print and electronic copies of same titles

All the six interviewees (100%) agreed that sometimes electronic devices such as Compact Disks do come with the printed copies of scholarly books as e-components of the particular titles. This is usually not a deliberate attempt on the part of the Systems Librarian to purchase e-copy of the collections already acquired in printed format. Thus, the availability of certain titles in both electronic and printed formats is more of coincidence than being a design. Therefore, the interviewees (100%) unanimously agreed that presently, there is no intent to acquire both physical and electronic copies of same titles in Nigerian academic libraries.

Challenges of acquiring local eBook titles

In Nigerian book chain, selection of local titles for eventual acquisition has been a great task due largely to absence of detailed and constantly updated catalogue that can guide Acquisition Librarians in the process of book selection and collection development. Also, lack of trust in publishers' willingness to pay appropriate royalties and subsequent usurpation of the role of booksellers by authors who double as marketers of their works is another cobweb in the selection process. On locally authored eBooks, the six interviewees (100%) consented that there is dearth of eBooks of Nigerian origin in the market. Therefore, all available titles in the e-collection in various university libraries are products of foreign

countries. They argued that it seemed Nigerian publishers and authors are not yet prepared to throw themselves to the emerging shift in book publishing.

Coping with Digital Rights Management

It was obvious from the responses of the interviewees that only one of them (16.6%) has some ideas about the concept of Digital Rights Management. Two of them (33.3%) asked what DRM is all about and when told could not talk much about it. Thus the concept is strange to majority of Systems Librarians in Nigerian university libraries. However, earlier responses to preceding questions portend that since eBooks come in form of PDF and are enmeshed in databases, there are no restrictions placed on their usage and accessibility to them once the user is able to scale through the gateway to the databases using username and password. This, database licensing arrangement, is one of the three licensing formats earlier highlighted by Rice (2013). The difficulty of accessibility mentioned by Melcher (2015) as a consequence of usage of DRM is not application in Nigerian university libraries.

Participation on consortia platform in eBook acquisition drive

Four of the six interviewees (66.6%) indicated that they have previously participated in some form of consortium platform even though the area of interest was general as it involved e-resources in general rather than being limited to eBooks. These interviewees pointed to the likes of NgRen which was brokered by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) as well as a recent arrangement by Research4life which saw three university libraries sharing cost and access to database platform that include Hinari, Agora, OARE and ARDI. They were however quick to say that the arrangement did not last due to non-fulfillment of terms of contract by participating libraries subsequently. This further reinforces the recommendation of Nwegbu et al (2011) which advocated a monitoring role for certain stakeholders with supervisory responsibilities in the Nigerian University System. They also alleged that these platforms did not enjoy certain components that were known with consortia as practiced in other climes.

Relationship between academic libraries and E-book aggregators

Book aggregators have all along been important stakeholders in the book trade globally. They assist in collation of resources from diverse publishers for easy access by Acquisition Librarians who do the task of selection and eventual collection of these materials for the libraries. The six interviewees (100%) confirmed the existence of a good working relationship between Nigerian academic libraries especially that of university extraction and eBook aggregators. EBSCOHOST, Science Direct and Research4life were identified as prominent aggregators patronized by these libraries. Once again, they emphasized the fact that these aggregators' platforms were not specifically devoted to eBooks; rather they were conglomerates of various electronic resources.

Compatibility of library e-collection with users' devices

There was no division among the interviewees (100%) with regards to compatibility of eBooks in the collection of the various university libraries with the clients' electronic devices. One of the interviewees said 'Currently, no complaints were received in relation to eBooks and devices compatibility; we may have such in future but not now'. They attested to the fact that the nature and format of the electronic books intertwined in e-resources packages subscribed to by the libraries do not necessitate exclusivity imbedded into packaging of some eBooks. All the eBooks come in form of PDF, thus posing no difficulty of usage to the library clients. They made no allusion to the challenges encountered by students with learning and visual impairments which were observed by Belher (2009).

Users'/ Business models subscribed to in academic libraries

All the interviewees (100%) were unanimous in their assertion that the case of users'/business models did not arise especially when the models are general and open to all users who have access to the username and password of the participating libraries. The non-existence of a process of purchasing eBooks based on individual titles has abridged the caveat which exists in individual-by-individual

bargaining for acquisition of eBooks. They contend that the aggregators must have calculated well ahead in their pricing of the databases.

Conclusions

The work was able to establish that e-books are common information resources available in Nigerian university libraries even though they comprise mainly of e-components attached with physical copies of titles at point of sale as well as those used to spice the electronic databases on the stable of aggregators of electronic resources. Thus, it is factual to assert that there is proliferation of e-books in academic libraries servicing Nigerian universities. Nonetheless, the titles that constitute these electronic collections are works of foreign authors published outside the shores of the country. This challenge will definitely have negative impact on the inclusion of local content that will address the acculturation and domestication of educational cum social values inherent in such disciplines. It is ironical that there is no identifiable percentage of the annual allocation of the university libraries' budgets dedicated to purchase of e-books. This does not imply that eBooks are not catered for in the budget, rather it shows the necessity of a sharing ratio between e-books and its physical component. Non patronage of individual titles by university libraries in Nigeria does not make e-book collection susceptible to restrictions attributable to Digital Rights Management (DRM), different business and users' models, and non-compatibility of electronic devices. Yet, it is appropriate to create awareness and organize training for Systems Librarians on the workings of DRM and other technical issues in management of electronic books in the library. Even though the university libraries have had experiences of what can be likened to consortium, the exercises have not been very comprehensive and all encompassing. Therefore, there is the need to involve libraries at the early stage of conception of such idea through every phase that may be required in order to achieve success and cooperation of all the stakeholders. Finally, production of e-books by Nigerian publishers is yet to commence as evident in the non-availability of Nigerian published

titles for acquisition to the library. There should be synergy among all those involved in the book chain to enhance rapid development in this growing phenomenon called e-book publishing.

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