FIFTY YEARS *OF* LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE IN A H M D U BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

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A paper presented at the symposium to mark the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee Celebrations Held at the Assembly Hall, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria on 10th-13th November, 2012.

Abstract

The paper discusses the concept of Information and its relevance to the society. The mission, mandate and values University library were highlighted. It took stock of what ABU University Library Complex has been and what it is currently; taking note of the advances in ICTs application and compliance to the Library 2.0 and Library 3.0 expectations. It concluded by advocating for the University Administration to deliberately and passionately support the course of the University Library Systems to enable it play its active role of enabler and facilitator in achieving the goals and aspirations of the university and that of all and sundry in the community and beyond.

Introduction

Like the age long story of the description of an elephant by some wise blind men, the concept 'information' has been conceived to mean different things by different information theorists such as Shannon, Weaver, Peirce, Bateson, Floridi, etc and also by individuals to reflect on the different prevailing circumstances and predispositions they are exposed to severally and collectively. Some see information as data, processed data, facts, analised data, etc. However like data, information can be: acquired; classified; stored; preserved; secured; conserved; archived; concealed; retrieved; edited; verified; aggregated; described; assumed; postulated; selected; speculated; hypnotised; imagined; chosen; exposed; disposed; deleted; syncronised; aliened; confirmed; rejected; compared; distributed; populated; disseminated; studied; evaluated; tested; analysed; extrapolated; and made relevant and useful or otherwise for: discussion; decision making; reacting to internal or external stimuli; making a difference in life and in all human endeavours. To a large extent therefore, **information is simply a by-product of the interfaces/interactions within, between and among the physical space, virtual space and human space.**

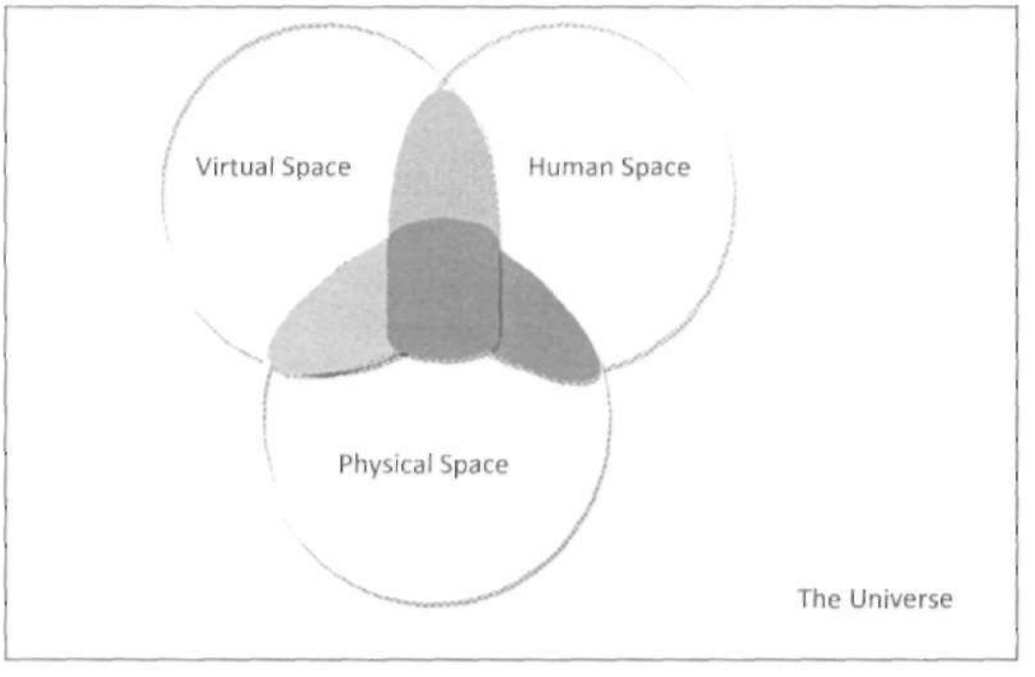


Fig 1: interfaces/interactions within, between and among the physical space, virtual space and human space.

The differences in the perceived meanings of the concept of information could be said to have perhaps allowed for coping with the inquisitive innate tendencies of not only man but all living beings to explore the world around and beyond them and also make a difference of any sort so desired. It is asserted that the illiterates of the 21st century are not those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn (Alvin Toffler). Essentially therefore, the literates of the 21st century are those who have competence in information literacy, media literacy and technology literacy. Other literacy

competences of an ideal 21st century literates include: economic literacy; civic literacy; health literacy; environmental literacy; national and global literacy; social and cross-cultural literacy; as well as such skills that allow for self initiatives and directions; productivity and accountability; leadership and responsibility; flexibility and adaptability; and effectiveness and efficiency.

Due to the dynamic nature and ever changing characteristic tendencies of information, it could also be conceived as **whatever we physically or otherwise come across consciously or unconsciously, accidentally or intentionally and regularly or occasionally that adds positively or otherwise to our existing knowledge, education and training, curricula, skills, practices, ideas, ideals, culture, tradition, belief, expectations, experiences and wellbeing.** This presupposes that at any point in time, we can severally and collectively make a difference in any circumstance to the extent we are able, willing and capable of identifying, locating, accessing and retrieving available relevant information about something and for something, as well as effectively utilise such information as something and in something. In reality, there is no information that is not relevant and irrelevant as well as useful and useless at the same time. The extent of the relevance and usefulness of a piece of information is largely contingent upon who, whom, when, where, what and why it was sought for. Thus, whenever information is needed and is successfully identified, accessed and utilised, eventually and naturally too, it will lead to reincarnation of endless demand and supply syndrome for the information at one time or the other – a reflection of the endless cyclical and chain nature and reaction of the dynamics of information.

Essentially, it could be said that information is a vital and strategic resource, perhaps more than anything else, that shapes and impacts on our daily life as it is all over and around us especially due to its pervasiveness in our thinking about the world around and beyond us. To a large extent, information is characteristically virtual and unpredefined; it's discrete, distinctive and multi dimensional in nature; and it's intertwined with the processes of education, training and learning as well as acquisition, access and utilisation of knowledge; skills and experiences. Hence, the need to not only seek, acquire and secure information regardless of the type, nature, quantum and location, but manage, package and disseminate it far and wide irrespective of the media to meet the yearnings of the target audience regardless of the time and location.

By and large, our actions and inactions, plans and strategies and indeed the extent of our national socio-economic, political, scientific, technological, educational and human developments are largely the by-products of the extent to which we are exposed or have access to the relevant information and are able, willing and capable to effectively and efficiently access, retrieve and utilise it to our advantage. Corollarily, the type of information available at our disposal have significant impact on the nature and focus of our national philosophy, vision, mission, goals, objectives and aspirations especially as it relates to strategic indicators of national advancements such as education; health; agriculture; economy;

politics and government; human development and social welfare; science and technology; and transport and communication.

Basically, our advances in any human endeavour as individuals, family, associates, affiliates, society and nation is largely a function of the type of information we are able, willing and capable to access and effectively utilise to satisfy our goals and aspirations. What is therefore necessary to effectively and efficiently maximize access and utilisation of needed and relevant information is to put in place effective strategies and mechanisms to explore and identify; acquire; organise/process and manage; store and secure; locate and retrieve; evaluate and assess; analyse and extrapolate; and package and disseminate information.

University Library

It is generally agreed and accepted that there can be no viable, standard and progressive University without a viable, standard and progressive University library. This explains why the accreditation grade of a university in terms of quality by accrediting institution is largely dependent upon the quality of its library. Essentially, the **major mandate or task** of any University library is to support, promote and facilitate the achievement of the university's major functions of teaching, learning, research and community services especially through the provision of needed relevant information resources in print and non print/electronic formats; progressive services; customer – friendly environment; state-of-the-art information systems and facilities; as well as competent and responsive personnel. Thus, the vision, mission and values of a University library must align with that of the parent institution.

The vision statement of a university library should be a world-class and most preferred centre of excellence for the support and provision of the state- of- the art information environment, systems, resources, services, competent personnel and facilities for study, learning, research and advancement of the community and the society. The **mission** statement of a university library should be to support, promote and provide high quality and relevant library and information resources and services for effective learning, study, teaching, research and advancement. In the same vein, the **core values** of a university library should centre on competence, integrity, customer-focused, excellence, honesty, creativity, innovativeness, entrepreneurship, quality, teamwork, partnership, collaboration, openness, diligence, caring and effective communication.

Essentially, the basic policy statement of any library is to meet or exceed its customers' expected satisfaction and performance especially in terms of quality information resources; quality products and services; human and material costs; effectiveness and efficiency; and minimum response time for customer inquires; etc. In effect therefore, the vision, mission and values of a university library can be said to be relevant and in focus when its systems, resources and services are in tangent with the university's set ideals continually. In order to keep and remain focused to ensure the attainment of the parent body's ideals and aspirations, it is necessary and apparent too; for university library and indeed any other type of library to ensure quality in the promotion and provision of the requisite library and information systems; resources; facilities; equipment; infrastructures; environment; products; services and personnel aimed at meeting the university's vision, mission and goals. This presupposes that for a

university library to succeed and indeed any other type of library too, especially in the developing economy:

- it **must** aim at being the best among its peers;
- it **must** not be the worse library among its peers;
- it **must** keep on improving upon its existing circumstance no matter what;
- it **must** be a point of reference worthy of being emulated all the time; and
- it **must** be creative, ready, willing and able to cope with the ever changing milieu of the prevailing circumstance irrespective of the cost.

Ahmadu Bello University Library

Knowing the strategic importance of library in a typical university setting, the University Library was already in existence by the inauguration of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria on 4th October 1962. It was made up of the inherited collections and buildings of the then Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (NCAST), the Institute of Administration and the Institute of Agriculture which formed the nucleus of the University Library Complex with the Headquarter at the Main Campus where the then new library for the NCAST; Shettima Kashim Library (now Kashim Ibrahim Library: KIL) was situated. It was planned to accommodate about 80 clientele and 55,000 volumes of information resources. It was occupied in August, 1962 (Plumbe: 1965).Other Components of the University Library Complex were the Bindery, Samaru Public Library (now Abdullahi Muhammad Public Library established in June,1963) and the ABC/ABU Kano Library (established in 1964).

Currently, the University Library Complex comprised of the 8 Divisions of the Main Library and the Satellite libraries:- President Kennedy Library (PKL); Centre for Islamic Legal Studies (CILS); Law Library; Medical Library; Abdullahi Muhammad Public Library; LEE T. Rail Back Library (former Veterinary Medical Library); Division of Agricultural Colleges Library (DAC Library); Arewa House Library; and Institute of Agricultural Research Library (IAR Library). Others are the Centre for Energy Research Library (CERT Library); National Animal Production Research Institute Library (NAPRI Library); and National Agricultural Extension Research and Liaison Services (NAERLS Library).

The ABU library collection which stood at 1,004 books at inception, rose to about 110,000 volumes of books, 2,350 current serials in 1975(Harrison and Adamu:1987). By 1987, the information resources in the KIL alone rose to about 300,000volumes of books and over 5,000 titles of periodicals (Harrison and Adamu: 1987). However, by the third quarter of 2012, the book stock in the KIL stood at 489, 710; 8,097 journal volumes, 25 online databases and 6 off-line databases on CD-ROMs/Hard disks. In line with the 1963 vision for Academic Departments to have their separate collections as supplement to that of the Main Library (KIL) and the subsequent take-off of Departmental Libraries in 1965, a Departmental Library Division was created in KIL in 1970 to cater for their needs including the processing of their information resources. This brings about the formal inclusion of the Departmental/Faculty Libraries into the main fold of the University-wide Library Complex, systems and schemes - a practice being maintained till date.

The current administrative structure of the ABU Library Complex comprised of the: all the Divisions of the Main Library-KIL (Management ,ICT, Customer Services, Reference and Information Services, Resource Processing, Resource Development, Media and Public Relations, Research and Bibliographical Services, Human Resources Development; Faculty/Departmental Libraries; and Serials Management); President Kennedy Library(PKL), Kongo Campus; the Library, Kongo Campus, Abdullahi Muhammad Public Library; Institute of Agriculture Library (IAR), Medical Library; Division of Agriculture Library(DAC lib);National Animal Production Research Library(NAPRI lib); Arewa House Library, Kaduna; National Agricultural Extension Research and Liaison Services (NAERLS Lib)and LEE T. Rail Back Library (formerly Veterinary Medical Library); and Centre for Energy Research Library(CERT lib). The University Librarian; Heads of the Satellite libraries; Heads of KIL Divisions; and the Administrative Secretary of the library constitute the membership of the University Library Management with the Heads/Representatives of the Faculty/Departmental Libraries and KIL Units in attendance as the case may be.

Ahmadu Bello University Library Today

In the 21st century, libraries must shone away from maintaining status-co and evolve from being mere store houses of books and documents to become strategic centres of information resources and services readily available and accessible to customers regardless of their location and time of access for their overall empowerment, sustainable development and advancement and also cope with the prevailing exigencies of the time. Thus, in line with the contemporary trends in the field of management, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and business settings, the administrative setup of the libraries has been reshaped to comply with the existing norms. Some of the changes include the establishment of ICT Division and the transformation of the then 'Staff Training Division, Collection Development Division, Technical Services Division, Media Division, Serial Division and Readers Services Division' into 'Human Resources Development Division; Customer Services Division; Resources Development Division; Resources Processing Division; Serial Management Division; and Media and Public Relations Division'. Other Units created to cope with the existing paradigm are: Quality Assurance Unit, Institutional Digital Repository (IDR) Unit and Bindery Unit.

You need not agree more with me that in the 21st century; libraries, information centres and indeed the library and information service providers and professionals need to embrace ICT and endeavour to initiate and innovate especially through the use of computers, Internet and cutting-edge technologies. They also need to employ marketing strategies in order to be relevant in the scheme things in the society; add value to the profession; enhance customer satisfaction; and win more favours from the parent organisations and the public at large. In line with this premise, the ABU library, particularly the KIL, could be said to have started shaking hands with computer technology before the close of the 20th century.

a) Library Automation

Though it could be said that the University of Ibadan (UI) library was the first in Nigeria to start automating its systems especially the serials catalogue in 1973, the ABU library (KIL), was the first university library in the country to really attempt to automate, especially, its circulation control systems

in-house in 1976 with the assistance of the University Computer Centre using the then Cyber 72 Main Frame Computer system. By 1978, the in-house project led to the installation of 2 computer terminals at the circulation desk for staff/public access (Mohammed: 1987). Although administrative, technical and financial challenges stalled the in-house automation project to almost a halt; alternative efforts were made by the ABU Library Management to keep the flag flying. By 1995, it was able to install turn-key library application software (Tin Lib) which went into comatose not too long it came to light due to some technical hitches associated with it. A workshop organised by the National Universities Commission (NUC) at the University of Ibadan (UI) in 1998 to showcase it and get it accepted by the Nigerian university libraries did not help its course for acceptability among the libraries.

Frantic effort towards automating the ABU University library operations, systems and services continued in 1998 when the then Sole Administrator inaugurated a 'Technical Committee on Computerisation of University Library System' to recommend on the most cost- effective and cost-beneficial strategies as well as efficient library application software to adopt for the automation of the University library systems, operations and services. Though the report of the committee was rarely implemented, what could be said to be its fallout was the unfortunate acquisition and installation of the 'Alice for Window' library application software which also did not impact much on the library system due to its obvious technical challenges and incompatibility with the environment it was originally designed to serve. About 47,401 records were however captured before the demise of the software.

However in 2007, the ABU University library along with other 5 University libraries in Nigeria finally settled for the Visionary Technology for Library System (VTLS – Virtua) library application software (version 2009.3) at discounted rate of $110,000: 00 with the assistance from the Mac Arthur Foundation grant and anchored by Mortenson Centre, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, UAS.

The successes recorded on the application of the VTLS software were largely due to: the series of scheduled online and off-line trainings and retraining of the staffs within and outside the country; the series of organised in-house training workshops; the services of the VTLS Global Support Customer Care System; the formation of Institutional VTLS Project Management Team and appointment of Institutional Project Manager by the respective participating university libraries; the establishment of National VTLS Project Coordination Office and appointment of National VTLS Coordinator; and the formation and quarterly meetings of the VTLS User-Group initiated and maintained by the cooperating University Libraries:- Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Bayero University, Kano; University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; and University of Jos, Jos.

Accordingly, the KIL was able to retro convert the Alice for Window database record to Virtua. It has in its Virtua database 158,087 Bibliographic records, 3,066 Authority records, 200,035 Item records and 2,744 Patron records mostly with the assistance of the part-time staff hired to bridge the gap occasioned by shortage of regular staff. The databases are easily accessed from the Online Public Access Catalogue {OPAC: http://www.abu.edu.ng/library and http://koraye:8000/cgi-bin/gw/chameleon} (ABU Library Complex April-June Report: 2012). As a first step, it has extracted from the MIS all the current undergraduate records and sent to the VTLS proprietor/Vendor for analysis, customisation and upload.

All the virtua modules are fully operational in KIL and are being used for information resources check-outs, check-ins and renewals for the virtua platform registered library customers and for other library operations such as resources processing, resources acquisition management and serials management. It is expected that the Satellite, Departmental/Faculty libraries would come on board fully in no distant future. To this effect, an in-house training workshop on Virtua was organised for the staff at the end of which each Departmental library was given 3 computer laptops to kick start the Virtua project implementation at their sites and another training workshop where each of the Satellite libraries were given 4 computer desktops to fast track the Virtua project implementation at their respective sites.

b) Library Digitisation

The availability and accessibility to ICT infrastructure and facilities especially in libraries and information centres has greatly facilitated the acquisition and creation of digital information resources and provision of online information services. Digitisation project in ABU library system could be said to have started in 2005 for the purpose digitising the theses and dissertations submitted for the award of higher degree certificates in the University. However, with the review of the University Library Complex Policy in 2009 and the subsequent establishment of ICT Division in the library administrative structure, an Institutional Digital Repository (IDR) was set up under the auspice of 'Digitisation Project Management Team' with a Repository Manager to digitise not only the theses and dissertations submitted for the award of higher degrees in the university, but the academic and non academic staff academic intellectual contributions informs of research reports , peer reviewed conference/ workshop/Seminar papers and proceedings, published articles in refereed journal publications as well as other strategic documents of/for the University which include examination questions, lecture notes and library scrap book on topical themes/issues.

Using the DSpace Management Software; Linux platform (as against the Windows platform earlier installed); a Server; Digital Scanners; other ICT facilities; and also with the cooperation of the University ICT Directorate for allocation IP addresses and hosting of the database, the library was able to install and re-install its digital systems and host its IDR { http://196.220.64.8:8080/jspui ; http://kubanni.abu.edu.ng:8080/jspui; and http://kubanni:8080/jspui } (ABU Library Complex April-June Report: 2012) with a collection of about 6,000copies of full text theses and dissertations; scanned and uploaded to server converted 1096 PDF documents; and over 300 scanned 'NOMA' publications, Samaru News Bulletin and Samaru Miscellaneous papers resident in the IAR library.

The library has also succeeded in creating Faculty/Departmental Communities and sub- Communities respectively; converted and uploaded the earlier scanned 1200 full text theses, dissertations and conference papers on to the DSpace software; acquired 5 state-of-the –art digital scanners for the project; empowered the Satellite libraries to fall in line on the digitisation project; acquired 5 Abby Fine Reader Optical Character Recognition (OCR) application software for the 5 digital scanners; host a National Workshop on Creating State –of –the-art Digital Library; host OCR training for about 20 library staff by XHS Nig. Ltd, Lagos; and entered into partnership in 2010 with the Nigerian Centre of Expertise for Greenstone Digital collections for the establishment of National Digital Centre for the country's Digital Repository.

c) Marketing of Library Products and Services

Conceived as 'not- for-profit' business outfit and environment and in consonant with the 4Ps of marketing principles as well as comply with Library 2.0 and library 3.0, the library established the 'Media and Public Relations Division' with the view to attract and retain customers; make the library products and services more attractive and inviting to the 'non—active' library customers; and also to bring to fore the library systems; products; and services even before the door steps of the 'off-location' customers on 24/7 regime. The Division has successfully created and hosted its webpage (http://www.abu.edu.ng/library) ; launched a monthly online and off-line University Library News Bulletin; provide cabled network television services; converted lots of analog based video recordings into digital format; installed an Electronic Marketing System (EMS) for promotion of the libraries' products and services; provide advanced Media Support especially for sourcing contents from the Internet; provide Special/Personal viewing services for the comfort of the customers; and provide Social Media Services platforms for the on-goings in the library and the University at large.

Describing the exciting moment to be a Librarian, Abdul-Hakeem (2012) advocated that a Transformational Librarian must evolve from that of being a store keeper saddled with a silo of documents to that of a knowledge consultant and facilitator that empowers our people with knowledge to sustainably improve themselves, those around them, the circumstances in which they exist, the future of those yet unborn and their environment. This suggests the need for libraries and librarians to go for tangible and intangible library and information systems and resources as well as provide physical and electronic services to satisfy their customers within and outside their immediate reach and also embrace ICT and the ICT culture in all their endeavours. Mohammed (2012) observed that the continued advances in ICTs have eased information access, management and transfer at possibly least cost, convenience and location, thereby rhyme with the dynamics of information. He added that, the new focus and effort across the globe and at all levels is to bring ICTs to bear on the management of human and materials resources; on all human endeavours as well as on the governance of nations; societies and communities; institutions; establishments; and management of systems and installations. This translates to the need for the 21st century libraries and information centres and indeed all public and private establishments and systems to be ICT compliant to enhance their performance and meet up to the contemporary expectations.

In line with the foregoing precepts, a 50 computer based Internet training room was established in KIL for the training of the university staff especially the academics and the postgraduate students on Internet and online database search. This is in addition to the 10 computer based CD-Rom Search Unit for accessing the Internet and off-line information resources databases on CD-ROMs and hard disks by the library customers. Courtesy of the MTN Education Foundation, a virtual library was established in KIL in 2009 with 128 sets of computers; 3 servers; a User Identification Card production machine; a V-sat; a printer; and a generator for online information services. About 16 online databases are being subscribed to for access by the university community especially the staff and students.

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