Prospects and Challenges of E-Books in School Media Services in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract

This paper discusses the prospects and the challenges of e-books in school media services in Nigeria and a particular emphasis on the way forward. It is generally observed that the roles and contributions of School Library otherwise known as School Media Resources to the educational development of our young minds cannot be overemphasized especially when one considers the functions of a library within the school system. Hence, this paper shows how the application of e-books could enrich the library services and thereby enhance the academic performance of students in Nigerian institutions of lower learning (secondary and primary schools). Besides, it discusses some problems that the author perceives could affect the application of e-books in the school media services. The author concludes the paper with some recommendations that could serve as a way forward to those challenges bedevilling the effective performance of the school media services in Nigerian schools.

1. Introduction

The roles and contributions of School Library otherwise known as School Media Resources Center to the educational development of our young minds cannot be over-emphasized especially when one considers the functions of a library within the school system. As the university library is the intellectual center of a university so also is a school library the center of intellectual activities in all the junior schools (primary & secondary) of any country. For this reason many educationally advanced countries pay much attention to the development of school library services (Adebamowo, 2011)**.** Therefore, school media center provides resources that support the curricula and satisfy the information needs of young students both in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. It serves as service delivery centers for these institutions of lower learning in any country.

Thus in this paper, the author shall be considering the prospects and the challenges of school media services and he

shall conclude his discussion by suggesting some solutions to those problems that affect the effectiveness of school media services in the Nigerian secondary schools.

2. Overview of E-Books

E-Books simply mean electronic books. These are printed books that appear in electronic format. Although sometimes defined as an electronic version of a printed book, many e-books exist without any printed equivalent (Oxford Dictionaries, 2010). Doiron (2011) noted that E-books can be books originally published in a traditional way and then digitized for use as an e-book or they can be books written directly for the digital market. E-books are usually intended to be read on dedicated e-book readers, however, almost any sophisticated electronic device that features a controllable viewing screen, including computers (desktop, laptop and other microcomputer systems), tablet computers (I-pad) and smartphones (Android, Blackberry and other sophisticated cell phones) can also be used to read e-books

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(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/e-book). Technically, e-books are digital books, though practically there is a big difference (xa.yung.com…). They are both in electronic formats but they differ, while e-books appear in internet websites this gives it a wider coverage and usage; digital books on its part are restricted to a particular library with limited users. However, digital books could become e-books when they are posted to website blog or the institutional portals and make available to the public through the internet connectivity to such portals.

Recently, a research was carried out by some American researchers in July 2014, it was discovered that e-books reading is increasing in the US, since July 2014 28% of adults had read an e-book, compared to 23% in 2013. This is increasing because 50% of Americans by 2014 had a dedicated device, either an e-reader or a tablet, compared to 30% owning a device at the end of 2013 (Pew Research, 2014). 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. Nonetheless, everyone in our country that is using cell phone can afford to access their information needs through these electronic devices in their possessions.

However, e-books can be produced in numerous formats that range from very basic text files to well structured, purpose built files that use one of the emerging standards for e-books such as: the e-Pub (one can download and read EPUB e-books using Adobe digital editions on a computer or Over Drive's app); Adobe PDF standards (you can download and read PDF titles using Adobe reader installed in your electronic device) (JISC Digital Media, 2014). Still on e-books formats, JISC Digital Media (2014) stresses that they can also appear as:

- Over Drive Read - Read in your browser. No software or downloads are required to read Over Drive Read e-Books. Reading progress and bookmarks are stored in the cloud, so you can always pick up where you left off no matter what device you're on. Some e-books automatically adjust to fit your screen, and others will allow you to zoom in and out. Over Drive Read have a lot of options to customize young mind reading experience.

- Kindle Books -You can read kindle books on any kindle device or kindle reading app. Kindle books are only available to borrow from U.S. libraries and schools. They work just like any other kindle book from Amazon, but they will expire at the end of your lending period like any library e-book.

- Media-Do Reader - Read in your browser. No software or downloads are required to read Media-Do Reader e-books. Reading progress and bookmarks are saved in your current browser. These e-books have a static layout with set page breaks, so you can zoom in and out in a page or graphic. Media-Do Reader is designed to read graphic novels and content that reads right to left or top-to-bottom (*help.overdrive.com/.../1482564-what-are-differences-between-e-book…*)

3. Features and Key Facts About E-Books

The characteristics of e-books as adapted from JISC Digital Media (2014) and used for this article; to support teaching and learning in Nigerian Schools include the following:

- Accessibility. E-books potentially remove limited access issues to key texts that can be a major problem for print books as they are available 24/7; even in different homes unlike traditional text/printed library materials which are restricted to the library buildings sited in a particular location. Therefore, E-books support accessibility in terms of being an alternative to print books and they have accessible aids to improve readability e.g. changing text size and contrast.

- Many institutions' library catalogues now offer e-book versions of some of their titles and journals and e-books open the door for a much greater range of books than the library could physically manage. For instance, OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) which saves the users' time in accessing their desired information within a short possible time.

- E-books can support in-class information retrieval by broadening the learning resource range. Some educational instruction materials have been digitized and posted to the telecommunication website so that students and other information seekers could access them. For instance, a Telecommunication outfit based in Nigeria known as Globalcom recently launched an electronic device educational project in Nigeria in order to meet the educational needs of their numerous customers.

- Flexible delivery. E-books can be located (via hyperlinking) in many places such as school course materials, offering access at appropriate points and time.

- Teachers can produce their own e-books as learning resources.

- E-books can work on desktop computers and mobile devices – note that many devices are included in the 'mobile' category e.g. laptops, mobile phones and

dedicated e-book readers such as the Kindle. For clarity devices like the Kindle are normally identified as 'dedicated e-book readers'.

- Usage can be tracked which helps catalogue managers manage expectations and resources such as which books to buy, license or remove. Unlike traditional library where intending borrower has to wait for days before such borrowed books could be retrieved from the borrower which may not be easily achieved due to some logistic problems attached to such request.

- Portable. Many e-books can be stored on a single device and taken with the owner or borrower which further supports accessibility of library materials.

- Hyperlinking within an e-book can increase the flexibility of topics covered from one source.

- E-books may be one solution to support an institutional educational project (JISC Digital Media , 2014)

4. E-Books Service Delivery

E-books can be made available or distributed to desktop computers, mobile devices and e-book readers of a potential user in a number of ways as outlined below:

E-book online stores, publishers and repositories – A typical store allows you to browse via your computer or device and then purchase books which can be downloaded for viewing. The e-books themselves may be downloaded in a number of ways as shown below:

Simple download. E-books are either made publicly available or available upon registration or payment and then a link is provided which allows the requested e-book to be downloaded directly to a computer.

Software Applications. There are a growing number of software applications (apps) that allow you to directly search, browse and download/purchase e-books straight to your computer or device. These apps may be integrated with online desktop stores.

Email. Some e-books can also be sent to email addresses of various information seekers or their electronic devices and then manually added to their e-book reader software or devices.

Library collections. Educational publishers have begun to provide some of their catalogues as e-books that staff and students can borrow like a traditional book. Although this method is still in its infancy as there are challenges around how to lend and record usage of e-books (Adapted from: *help.overdrive.com/.../1482564-what-are-differences-between-e-book…*).

5. Prospects of E-Books Over Other Books

Here the author highlights and discusses some possible benefits that the School media can derive from the introduction of e-books into the library services over the traditional printed library collections. In support of this view, Adewole-Odeshi (2014) in her study on the attitude of students towards e-learning in South-West Nigerian universities posits that students have a positive attitude towards e-learning because they find the system easy to use and useful for their course work. Hence, the perceived benefits of introducing e-books into the school media services include the following:

Accessibility of information:

E-book enhances easy and quick accessibility of information in the educational materials stocked by the school library otherwise known as School Media Resource Centre. School Media Centre is being stocked by variety of educational materials; while some are in printed format traditionally kept in the library, others are in digitized format electronically stored in the library blog of the Institutional website. Ironically, library users find those electronic materials easier and faster to access for their information needs. Patrons can access e-books at any time and in everywhere without undue resistance from anyone; unlike the traditional/physical library whose accessibility is limited to a particular opening hours and with some conditions attached to admittance into the library building (Adeyanju; Achonna & Yaya, 2012).

Time saving agent:

Among the five basic laws of librarianship that was beautifully postulated by an eminent mathematician and librarian S.R. Ranganathan in 1963 is "Save the time of the reader**"**. This implies that time is a precious and scarce commodity of any library user. He/she is happy to discover that such precious time is adequately managed by the librarian. Thus, electronic materials stocked by the school media centers help in saving the time of the reader; as they can get their required materials in a shortest time.

Enhances reading habit:

It is a popular saying that "if you want to hide any vital information from an individual keep it in a book but if you want him to have knowledge of such vital information, put such information in the screen format that is digitize it". Yes, this assertion might be true; people generally have poor attitude towards reading. Most secondary school students find it difficult to read their books except during examination period when they will hurriedly do so. No wonder, there is mass failure among these students in their final examinations.

Therefore, this periodic problem has to stop. Thus, e-books or e-library resources serve as one of the strategies by which reading habit can be instilled on the minds of our beautiful young library users. To corroborate this view, Doiron (2011) affirms that many public libraries have embraced the use of e-books and e-readers in their efforts to promote reading, keep up with client demands and address the specific needs of young readers. The author laments that school libraries are dragging behind in doing so. Happily, most of them especially the private school libraries are now woken up from their slumbers by field-testing the use of services where students and teachers can access e-books (Doiron, 2011) for their educational success. Therefore, all public secondary schools in Nigeria are enjoined to follow this modern trend of information processing and dissemination.

Cost effectiveness:

Although the cost of procuring and installing e-books and its facilities might be very high at the initial stage but at the long run, the cost is relatively low comparing to the traditional library collections in which large amount of money is needed to acquire more new and current educational materials to the library collection from time to time. Pay workers' salaries at the end of each month; unlike e-books center where the management only requires the services of one or at most two members of staff to manage the entire electronic library collections.

Space Conservation:

Inadequacy of space has been one of the greatest problems that militates against the growth and expansion of libraries. According to Ranganathan (1963), "library is a growing organism"; this implies that growth and collection development has been the hallmark of any library. Periodically, library has to acquire more relevant and current resources in order to satisfy the information needs of its readers; this takes large percentage of library space; besides, it needs more space for furniture and fittings, machine and equipment and personnel offices. But with the digitization of library collections especially e-books; more space will be conserved as it requires few space for the installation and operations of the e-books and its accessories. So, when the library had no space for extension, digitization of library resources (particularly provision of e-books and other e-materials to our readers) is the only solution (Yaya & Adeyokun, 2011).

Networking:

A particular digital library can provide the link to any other resources of other libraries within and outside its geographical location very easily thus a seamlessly integrated resource sharing can be achieved by the cooperative libraries

(Yaya & Adeyokun, 2011).

Portability:

The resources of traditional library are too bulky to move from place to place and this had greatly affected the effective retrieval and utilization of such items by a potential library patron. E-book collections are more portable and convenient to be used by any information patron at any time and at any location or even at users' convenient postures.

No physical boundary:

The users of e-books need not to visit the library physically; intending users all over the world could gain easy access to e-books and other e-materials of their choice from any digitized library at any point of time as long as an internet connection is available in their location. Thus, they can access library collections at their convenient time.

6. Challenges of E-Books in School Media Services

Generally, with the introduction of technology into the services of any library especially the school library has revolutionized the operations and services of such traditional library and had brought enormous accolade to the librarianship profession. Yet, the application of e-books into the school media resource center has some number of militating factors that impede its successful implementation especially as relate to our country – Nigeria. Some of these factors are itemized and discussed as follows:

Initial High Cost:

It can be observed that the initial cost of acquiring and installing the e-books hardware, software and internet connectivity to communication or telecommunication organizations is too high for most public Schools in Nigeria to afford. Besides, cost of hiring and engaging the services of technical experts especially if they are foreigners is extremely high to come by. Unlike traditional library, where the management can decide to acquire their collections according to the dictation of their financial strength.

Political Factors:

Our country is presently under the civilian administration. That is, management of her resources as well as administration is under the control of some political parties and politicians. Sadly, most of these politicians are not too keen about the development of educational system in our great country. They are treating everything that concerns the education and security of life and properties in Nigeria politically. As a result of this, they are trading with the future of our youth that occupies high percentage of Nigerian

population. What will one say about a country where teachers at all levels (primary, secondary and even tertiary institutions) were on strikes for several months due non-payment of their monthly salaries and wages; yet, government officials developed a silent posture towards their plight and flagrantly refused to meet their demands. How can library be effectively funded in the hands of such carefree and callous politicians? Your answer is as good as mine!

Inadequate funding:

Finance is an essential factor that determines the success of any organization; school media resource center inclusive. Money is needed to procure hardware, software, furniture and fittings, educational resources, to engage qualified and experienced manpower in the library and to construct a befitting structure to house the library collections. Unfortunately, there is an acute short supply of fund to implement all those laudable library projects. It could be noted that public schools are owned and finance by the State and Local governments. The general perception of most government officials is that library is not a money generating institution; that is, they are not for money yielding organization (Yaya; Achonna & Osisanwo, 2014); they (politicians) believe that its projects must not be given a top priority. This negative posture had greatly affected the educational system especially the school media services in most Nigerian schools; many beautiful projects and visions are calling for the attention of government in order to make it come to reality.

Technical factors:

These are technical related problems that are militating against the effectiveness of e-books hardware (equipment) and software in the school media services. According to Siracusa (2009) and Doiron (2011), those technical factors include: 1) the size and quality of the screen; 2) resistance to reading on a screen rather than holding a "real book"; 3) the e-reading device itself – too small, scared of breaking it, having to charge the batteries, etc.; and 4) the lack of e-book standards both in platform and publishing rules. Others point out issues of e-book piracy (Rivero, 2010; Spring, 2010) and conflicts with open access, propriety rights and copyright (Williams, 2011) collectively referred to as digital rights management (Doiron, 2011).

Inadequate Skilled Manpower:

The part played by the manpower in any organization cannot be underestimated; the organization may have a well-furnished building, procure modern hardware and software, raw materials or buy current and relevant library materials; but if it lacks skilled manpower all the efforts are in futility. According to Ekwueme (2013), skilled human resources are needed for the implementation of all the new technology in the library. This is one of the main challenges in the school media resource center. It is worrisome to note that in most schools, there is no qualified librarian to manage the library collections talk less of operating the e-books facilities and accessories. Library is pitifully left in the hands of unqualified teacher librarian who knows nothing about the librarianship profession. Ashcroft and Watts (2004) observed that Nigeria has an acute shortage of digital system librarians; information and web technology literate staff in libraries install and manage technology networks. At such, library will not be able to function effectively and realize its stated goals and objectives.

Infrastructural challenges:

In most schools, there is no adequate provision for a befitting library building dedicated for the library and its resources. While in some other schools, where they boast of a dedicated library building, it is an empty space without the necessary facilities to promote reading culture among those youngsters.

Inaccessibility of complex information:

According to Ekwueme (2013), library user's quest for knowledge and information has become more complex with technological document in computers and the development of the internet. Information resources available are so numerous that users become confused by the search techniques. The author further reiterated that the inexperienced users can produce searches formulated too widely, in which case the system retrieves excess irrelevant documents. Then, time and energy will be wasted browsing through these irrelevant documents; but if searchers use too many restricted keywords this can result in failure to identify all the relevant e-books needed by the user.

Erratic Power Supply:

The erratic nature of electricity power supply in Nigeria is a major problem (Adeyanju et al, 2012). Therefore, e-books and its installed hardware cannot exist in this situation because web servers that host locally e-books contents and proxy server that provide authentication and remote access to subscribed electronic resources need to be on for twenty four hours a day. There should be no power outage. Thanks be to God, the Nigerian civilian Federal Government has finally commercialized the sector; we hope that this might improve electricity generation in our country.

Technological challenges:

According to Adeyanju et al (2012:145), "building and sustaining an e-book library collection requires the proper technological infrastructures". These infrastructures include telecommunication, servers, and application platforms with its software applications. Telecommunication infrastructure is

a major factor in the deployment of Information Communication Technology (ICT), particularly for the implementation of an e-book library collection. Interestingly, Nigeria has recorded a massive improvement in the telecommunication industry over the past few years; especially with the full commercialization policy of the Federal government in that sector. The Nigerian Communications Commission's regulatory efforts have led to the proliferation of Internet cafes in all parts of the country and this has also made a significant impact in all sectors such as: commerce, social and educational (Adeyanju et al, 2012).

7. Recommendations: The Way Forward

In this paper, the author had discussed various factors that could militate against the effectiveness of e-books in the social media services in Nigeria; here, he wants to recommend some solutions to the stake holders especially the administrators of these schools that play hosts to the school libraries (school media centers). Also, it could be noted that these suggested points serve as a way forward; thus, he gives his suggested recommendation on each highlighted problems as:

- Initial high cost of the e-book materials and inadequate funding. The State governments that owned these public schools in Nigeria should bail them out from this problem. This can be done by increasing the annual budget and subventions allocated for each school in their various States. Also, administrators of these schools could seek for the assistance of kind hearted philanthropists in the society.

- Political factors. The State government should depoliticize the educational system. That is, educational matters should be separated from the political wrangling. School developmental projects such as e-books and full school library digitization should be actively supported by the government of the day in spite of their political inclination.

- Technical factors. The school authorities while planning to purchase those e-books hard ware, they should go for those ones that have lesser hazard effect on the health condition of its library personnel.

- Inadequate skilled manpower. For the effectiveness of e-books in the school media services, the State government should engage the services of those personnel who are skillful in the ICT and its accessories. Also, the unskilled staff should be sponsored to attend seminars and workshop where they will be exposed to some practical courses in ICT; thereby enhance their mental capabilities to manage the e-books collections in the absent of ICT experts.

- Infrastructural challenges. The owners of each public secondary school should devote more funds for capital development especially for the building of ultramodern school library building and furnish it with ICT facilities.

- Accessibility of complex information. Although this has been a serious problem to many library users and information seekers but it can be adequately tackled by the library management. This can be done through users' education; library users should be taught various steps through which they can surf for relevant educational materials from the internet. These procedures should be written down as a guide for the library users to follow anytime they are to consult e-books in the library.

- Erratic power supply. The Federal Government should intensify their efforts in providing electricity to every part of our country especially the educational sector. Also, the management of each school could acquire power generating set through the assistance of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members; although this might be too expensive to maintain but it serves as backup in case of electricity power outage.

- Finally, technological factors. Even though the Federal government had recorded great success in the telecommunication sector; yet, there is still much to be done in this regard; more telecommunication companies especially those who are interested in the educational development in the country. The already established ones should drastically reduce their internet connectivity charges so as to enable more schools to get connected to the telecommunication facilities.

8. Conclusion

This paper has established that e-books resources is an expensive but necessary project that each school in the federation should embarked upon in order to make the educational resources kept by the school library otherwise known as school media resource center accessible to every library user. 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 educational resources in our schools; these will enhance easy access to the educational resources in our schools. Besides, there is need for the government to put in place strategies and policies that will enable the school libraries in Nigeria to achieve the objectives of virtual library. Thus, the provision of library services through the application of ICTs is the current norm in librarianship globally. Therefore, the government should equally make

efforts to provide funds for policy implementation, provide necessary technological training and re-training for librarians so that they will be more effective in their information dissemination roles.

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