INFORMATION RESOURCE EXPLOSION AND LOW ACQUISITION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION

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Abstract

The paper essentially discusses issues and strategies of combating the problems of information explosion which have launched the world into an information age that could be labelled tsunami vis-à-vis low acquisition of library resources in Nigerian academic libraries. Information is seriously exploding at a geometric progression thus, academic libraries in Nigeria find it difficult to cope with the exponential rate at which information is generated and produced in terms of acquisition. However, efficient and effective library service delivery can only be guaranteed by meeting information needs of library users. The paper is an opinion paper that highlights issues and strategies required by Nigerian libraries to face the challenge of low acquisition of information materials in the face of information resources explosion. The paper pinpoints inadequate accommodation, copyright infringement, fraud and corruption, inadequate funding, infusion of Information and communication technology, poor bibliographic control, high cost of information resources and other identified problems as the bane of low acquisition of information materials in most Nigerian academic libraries. It is recommended among others that, federal, state, corporate and private owners of higher institutions and research centres in Nigeria should increase funding of academic libraries so as to beef up their information materials to meet the information needs of the members of the parent institutions. Philanthropists, government and non-governmental organisations should complement the efforts of both federal and state governments in stocking academic libraries with recent and relevant information materials. Also, academic libraries should collaborate through a consortium to subscribe to electronic information materials. Alternative power sources should also be explored. A current and comprehensive national bibliography would be a priceless acquisition tool for librarians and the issue of corruption, embezzlement and library security should be addressed appropriately.

Keywords: Information resources, information explosion, information tsunami, low acquisition, Nigerian academic libraries.

Introduction

Information could be regarded as carefully processed data for useful purposes, as well as values in decision making process and solution to a problem. Acquisition of information and dissemination of same has been the primary concern of libraries

for many years. The library as a repository of knowledge has undergone tremendous transformations from the era of ancient library to the present age of ICT. It is perhaps the only institution that has been affected continually by technological changes, yet the library has continued to blend for the benefit of humanity (Kadiri and Adetoro, 2012). While the discovery of papyrus and the printing technology meant availability of multiple copies for the library, microforms, pictures and films had contributed to space-saving. Information Technology (IT) combines all the advantages derivable from earlier developments. With IT, information resources are created with ease, distributed without hindrance and accessed at will. It is this ease with which information resources are created and distributed that brought about exponential growth of information resources.

Information explosion is the rapid increase in the amount of published information. It is a situation in which information is abundantly available. According to Imeremba (2000), after the World War II, the world production of books and periodic journals increased out of proportion, and a state of impending documentary chaos was declared by librarians. In the early 1960s, the rate of information production rose so much so that, there was panic that the world would become so inundated with literature that, man himself would be displaced by his own record. Indeed, information resources have gone from scarcity to super-abundance. Jungwirth (2002) posits that about 1,000 books (beside journals) are published internationally every day and that, the total of all printed knowledge doubles every five years. More information is estimated to have been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000 years.

Statement of the problem
The reality of information resource proliferation suggests that researchers and other categories of information users have been presented with varieties of sources for knowledge and informed decision making. Library users are expected to have unhindered access to information resources of their choice, since they are overwhelmingly available for academic purposes and personal enrichment. Ironically, Ifidon and Ifidon (2008) observe that, there is an ongoing and severe shortage of information resources in many Nigerian academic libraries. Lending credence to this assertion, Ochogwu (2012) notes that, even though the world is experiencing the concept of information explosion or overload, the third world countries of which Nigeria is a part, can be said to be experiencing information poverty occasioned by low acquisition especially among institutions of higher learning. This situation is however disturbing because, in an academic environment, lecturers want to be abreast of latest discoveries in their various fields of specialisation. They have researches to carry out and lectures to deliver. Students have a quest for academic excellence. All these require current information resources without which the fundamental essence of the library in supporting the vision and mission of the parent institutions may be defeated. The continuous dwindling of the collections of Nigerian academic libraries in the face of unprecedented proliferation of information resources, coupled with the ever-

increasing number of users of these libraries, calls for concern. It is against this backdrop that this paper basically examines the factors responsible for the decrease in the acquisition rate of Nigerian academic libraries and to suggest ways of overcoming the challenge.

The reality of information explosion

Information explosion is indeed a 21st century reality and researchers have tried to quantify the extent of this phenomenon. Jungwirth (2002) posits that, about 1,000 books (beside journals) are published internationally every day and that, the sum total of all printed knowledge doubles every five years. He further maintains that, more information is estimated to have been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000 years. So great is the volume of information today that, Wurman and Bradford (1996) cited in Wyllys (2000), describe it as 'information explosion' or 'information tsunami'. They asserted that,

> 'There is a tsunami of data that is crashing into the beaches of the world. It is a tidal wave of unrelated, growing data formed in bits and bytes, coming in an unorganized, uncontrolled, incoherent cacophony of foam. The tsunami is a wall of data, that is, data produced at greater and greater speed, greater and greater amounts to store in memory, amounts that double, it seems, with each sunset. On tape, on disks, on paper, sent by streams of light. Faster, more and more and more. …

Twenty years after Wurman and Bradford made the above observation; there has been an unprecedented increase of information resources on minute bases across the globe currently being propelled by ICT. The historical growth of published materials had undergone an interesting trend as follows:

- ❖ By 1550 - 35,000 book titles were published;

- ❖ By 1850 - 3.3 million titles were published;
- ❖ By 2000 - 52 million book titles were published.

This implies that books and other information resources are being published at such a rapid speed that they make users more exponentially ignorant. Based on the above figures, if a person reads one book per day, he/she would be neglecting 4,000 other titles published that same day (Kadiri and Adetoro, 2012). In other words, the books he did not read would pile up four thousand times faster than the books he did read, and his ignorance would grow four thousand times faster than his knowledge. To support this assertion, Ifidon (2006) opines that, one million books are now produced every year and the current number of periodical publications stands at over 15,000 titles. These figures, the author observes, exclude government publications, United Nations' documents and machine readable materials. It should be noted that, governments and United Nations and all their agencies are the world's most prolific publishers.

The world produced almost 800MB of recorded information per person each year in 2003. By 2009, the amount of digital information grew 62 percent over to 800 billion

gigabytes. In 2002, there were 5 exabytes of information stored on computers which is equivalent to 37 Libraries of Congress and this has grown to 161 exabytes in 2006 (Szabo, 2007). The size of the internet often illustrates the amount of information at the disposal of library users today. Indeed, the quantity of available information resources is overwhelming and unimaginable so much so that, mankind is presently being inundated by its own records. However, there is a drastic decrease in the acquisition rate of academic libraries in Nigeria against a geometric increase in the number of patrons. This is evident in the inadequate size and obsoleteness of books and journals available in these libraries.

Factors responsible for information explosion
Blackford (2012) identifies the causes of information explosion to include; the invention of the printing press in the middle of 15th century, the growth of literacy among the middle class in the 17th and 18th centuries and the advent of information technology. The history of printing dates back to 1450, when Johann Gutenberg of Germany invented the movable press. The advantages brought by this invention are numerous. It led to quicker production and reproduction of books. Books then became cheaper because of less human involvement in production and there was great accessibility to information materials. All these led to swifter spread of ideas from one generation to another (Imeremba, 2000). Gutenberg's invention was not the end of the development of printers, but the world saw more printers like the Xerox in 1938, EARS in 1971, the inkjet printer in 1976, Laserjet 4 in 1992, IBM 3800, among others with greater capabilities (Blackford, 2012). Exponential availability of information in forms of books, journal papers, patent books, grey literature gained prominence in view of improved publishing facilities.

Also, the growth of literacy among the middle class in the 17th and 18th centuries (generally known as the age of reasoning and enlightenment) and the 19th century's mass education movement increased both the amount and demand for information. During these eras, the rich were not the only ones privy to information but all classes of people. People craved for information so as to increase their knowledge. As a result, a new consciousness was born, called 'the book consciousness' (Szabo, 2007). This led to a massive reproduction of literatures that were distributed worldwide to drive and sustain the new-born consciousness. Today, new disciplines are still emerging and the spread of knowledge is on the increase hence, the continuous generation and dissemination of new information.

Furthermore, the increasing relationship between information and the competitive economic advantages of nations facilitated information explosion. The information age started during a period beginning about 1975 and is characterized by the gathering and almost instantaneous transmission of vast amounts of information and by the rise of information-based industries. Information is bought and sold and therefore has to be stored for safekeeping as well as for fast transfer. What exists because of the need to store, is the development of new and larger storage devices, which keep information from being destroyed (Blackford, 2012). The implication of this development is that, information-based industries no longer discard

information, but they can keep on developing their database which eventually leads to information explosion.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) contributed significantly to information explosion. Equally, advances in information processing technology immensely increased the creation, storage and flow of information. It has made the delivery of basic information more effective and dissemination of information faster (Aboyade, Madu and Aboyade, 2016). The invention of printing press prompted the increase in information generation while ICT multiplied it. ICT evolved a new and most efficient dimension of information creation and transfer, hence making information explosion inevitable. Although information explosion preceded information technology especially the internet and the web, its contribution to the former is unprecedented.

Hjorland (2006) cited in Kadiri and Adetoro (2012), while acknowledging the reality of information explosion argues that, what is actually happening is publication or paper explosion characterized by more pages of professional journals and books, which are expanding exponentially. In the academic and research institutes, publication of books and journal papers is considered a sine qua non for recognition and promotion among academics and researchers. Hence, the "publish or perish" condition among academics and researchers is a contributory factor behind information explosion as hundreds of thousands of journal articles are published continuously both in print and electronic versions by researchers and academics.

Librarianship begins with acquisition and acquisition processes. There would not be any library and information services without acquisition of information resources. Therefore, the pride of any library is the quality and quantity of its collection, without which the library will be 'toothless'. Ifidon (2006) opines that, beautiful buildings, well-trained staff and modern information storage and retrieval systems can only be appreciated if excellent services are rendered to users; and that these services cannot be provided without adequate and live collection.

Acquisition is the process of securing information materials for the library's collection, whether by purchase, as gift or through exchange programmes. It involves the procurement of information resources which include both book or non-book materials with the aim of constantly adding new titles to the collection of a library. Purchases, gifts, donations, exchange, legal deposits, photocopy, bequeathing are some of the methods through which libraries acquire information resources. Of all these, purchase is the most dependable means of acquiring relevant and up-to-date information materials in the library. Whatever method a library adopts for acquiring its information resources, what is indisputable is that, collection development is probably the most single important component of library services, because without it, services cannot be rendered. Although information explosion is a 21st century reality and is being explored by academic libraries in developed nations for effective services delivery, their counterparts in

Nigeria are still battling with insufficient resources to meet the information needs of their ever-increasing patrons.

Factors responsible for low acquisition in academic libraries in Nigeria.
Several factors have been identified to be responsible for the low acquisition in academic libraries in Nigeria. Some of them are discussed below:

Inadequate funding: The first obvious problem that confronts acquisition librarians is paucity of funds or inadequate financial support. Within an academic setting, the search for new knowledge is ever pressing, however, provision of knowledge is costly and requires money to achieve. Without adequate book vote or allocation, the acquisition of requisite resources will greatly be impeded. It must be borne in mind that, some library resources are expensive and require adequate funds to procure them for libraries. Generally, the largest portion of financial support to academic libraries is derived from regular government subvention and irregular grants. However, such subvention and grants have recorded significant reductions over the years. This problem is so grave, given the ratio of what is eventually acquired in relation to what should actually be acquired. Some reasons have been adduced for this low funding. According to Ifidon (2006), the library is seen as a bottomless pit, infinitely expandable and always in pursuit of undefined and presumably unattainable goals. Other reasons are the library's inability to exert pressure, as well as interferences from the managers of academic institutions and their financial officers.

Poor bibliographic control: By western standard, African book publishing output is small and very low. Even then, this small quantity is difficult to identify for acquisition. Although Nigeria has a national bibliography, there are a number of inadequacies bedeviling it. It is usually published behind schedule, since it is an annual publication, there is a considerable time lag before it is published. In general, it is based on legal deposit which is almost invariably evaded by many publishers. Therefore, the national bibliography is incomplete and does not represent the true picture of the country's publication output. Since it is difficult to trace regular publications, it is almost impossible to locate and acquire government publications.

Effect of ICT on Library: Infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in libraries and information centres has brought about both its advantages and disadvantages across the globe. It is a fact that, ICT is highly effective in library services as it has satisfactorily been meeting various information needs of users through access to e-books, academic journals, digital archives, and so many other electronic materials. As good as it poses to be, it is part of the factors responsible for low acquisition of information materials in academic libraries in Nigeria. Most of the information resources are now automated or digitized. Thus, high and prohibitive cost of library automation, electronic databases, e-books, hardware, software, staff training, coupled with constant technological change, exorbitant exchange rate, poor and epileptic electricity supply and a host of others have negatively affected acquisition of information materials in academic libraries in Nigeria.

High cost of information resources: The high cost of materials also poses a great challenge to acquisition. It incapacitates libraries in acquiring the right quantity and quality of materials they need. Nigerian libraries depend significantly on imported books. Today, the country's economy is in a deplorable state of recession with an unprecedented surge in foreign exchange rates which has greatly affected the purchasing power of most libraries.

Low book publishing output: Even though it is true that the world is experiencing information explosion, researches have shown that the publication output of developing nations is grossly insignificant when compared with that of the developed nations. For instance, between 2001/2002, the book production output of China, United Kingdom and the USA were put at 115,800, 98,604 and 93,775 respectively; while that of Nigeria, South Africa and Benin Republic (Africa's top three publishing nations) within the same period were put at 15,716, 14,609 and 10,985 respectively (Ifidon, 2006). The clear implication of this is that, over 90% of books in Nigeria are imported. This problem is further compounded given the fact that, local authors are discouraged by low patronage, plagiarists or academic fraudsters, disregard and lack the motivation to put in their best.

Inadequate accommodation: This is another factor impeding acquisition of information resources. Acquisition requires adequate accommodation to house the different materials that a library acquires. The library is a growing organism which must accommodate growth, not just in staff, collection and patron but also in the physical building. Regrettably, most academic libraries in Nigeria lack sufficient and adequate accommodation to house their acquisitions.

Copyright infringement: This could be viewed as a fragrant abuse, violation and theft of intellectual property rights of authors and creators of intellectual works through an unauthorized usage of copyrighted materials (United States Copyright Office, 2012). The nefarious activities of pirates of information materials have continued to summersault the efforts of both the Nigerian Copyright Commission and that of copyright owners, thus discouraging local intellectual creativity. Pirates of information materials and other copyright offenders have negatively affected creation and production of information materials in Nigeria. Consequently, there is a heavy dependence on foreign materials to stock academic libraries in Nigeria, thus, with the attendant economic recession, academic libraries are greatly impoverished in terms of information materials to satisfy the information needs of their clientele.

Fraud and corruption: The bane of all forms of development in Nigeria is corruption. It is a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society, the academic institutions inclusive. Some library and institution's staff misappropriate, embezzle or divert funds for acquisition of books and journals. This is most disturbing because greater part of what is obtained from the admitted insufficient allocation end up being siphoned by some library managers and their collaborators for private use.

Ways of improving acquisition rate in academic libraries in Nigeria

It is obvious that a myriad of factors are responsible for the low acquisition rate of academic libraries in Nigeria in the face of global information explosion. The situation is certainly grim but not hopeless in that, there is no problem without solution. In view of this, librarians must take their fate in their own hands. They must not throw up their hands in despair as if it is the end of the world. Onwubiko (2006) opines that, the shift from traditional to modern librarianship suggests to libraries and librarians that, it can no longer be the era of passive and apologetic librarianship as before, but an era of aggressive and active librarianship if the demands of the new age must be met. Therefore, there is the need to form pressure groups to goad the parent institutions and their supervisory ministries to action. Lobbying, backed up by the libraries' blue prints and collection development policies have been known to yield positive results in the industrialized nations. Friends of the library and the library users can also be of tremendous help in this regard.

Given the reality of information explosion, coupled with population growth in academic institutions, there is a greater need for improved funding for academic institutions in general and library services in particular. It has been noted that, latest, useful, right and appropriate information is the key to personal and professional development in the world of academics. Therefore, if the government is sincerely committed to providing quality higher education for the Nigerian people, the sincerity must be manifested through adequate funding for academic institutions, nay the library. As suggested by Aboyade, Madu and Aboyade (2016), governments at all levels should see funding of library services in the light of active investment rather than a passive obligation. This will go a long way to mitigating the financial challenges being faced by librarians in developing their collection as well as providing adequate accommodation for collection development.

Furthermore, academic libraries in Nigeria can reach out to national and international donor agencies that give grants and donate information materials to supplement annual book subventions. The acquisition challenges of most of these libraries are so frightening that the need to embrace the benevolence of donor agencies has become imperative. Some of these agencies include; International Book Project (IBP); Book for Africa (BFA); International Book Bank (IBB); Darian Book Aid Plan (DBAP); International Network for Availability of publications (INAP); Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA); Standing Conference for African Universities (SCAU); International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA); Netherland Periodicals Project (NPP); Carnegie Corporation of New York; alumni associations; National Library Associations etc. These and many other financial and material sources abound the world over but, many librarians are ignorant about them. If academic library managers in Nigeria can take the initiative of reaching out to these agencies, they are likely to reap handsome dividends.

Explosion in published output, static and in many cases, decreasing library budgets along with prohibitive cost of published materials have made it virtually impossible for libraries to fulfill the information needs of their clientele (Nelson, 2012). In view of these, cooperative acquisition is one of the solutions to the problem of collection development. To overcome the challenge of low acquisition, academic libraries in Nigeria must cooperate and collaborate with each other. This can manifest in form of inter-library loan service as well as forming a consortium to subscribe to electronic information materials such as databases and e-books. Library cooperation helps to reduce cost, as it enhances user's accessibility to more materials.

In order to curtail the high cost of information materials, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should, as a matter of urgent necessity, remove any form of tariff on importation of books and other such resources especially for educational institutions. It will not be out of place if the cost of information resources is subsidized by the government. This will enable academic libraries to acquire sufficient information resources for their ever-increasing patrons.

Conclusion

The present age is described as information age because national economies are based on information. The concept of information explosion is a 21st century global reality because of the overwhelming availability of information resources. This reality is however a complete irony in most academic libraries in Nigeria as they hardly have enough information resources for their services. This is worrisome given the fact that, no library is worthy to be called one if it does not possess the resources required to satisfy the information needs of its users. In view of this, proliferation of information resources should be a welcome development if academic libraries in Nigeria can utilize this opportunity to acquire sufficient resources to meet the teaching, research and information needs of the members of their parent institutions. Although many factors account for low acquisitions in most Nigerian academic libraries, they are not insurmountable.

Recommendations

For academic libraries in Nigeria to overcome the challenge of low acquisition in the face of global information explosion, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Both Federal and State Governments of Nigeria as well as other stakeholders connected with higher institutions of learning (universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and research institutes) should ensure adequate funding for the library operations in the light of active investment. Adequate funding will help libraries in the acquisition of necessary information resources and facilities. As a matter of urgency, there is a dire need for Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) to increase the funding of libraries in higher institutions of learning so as to enable them support the vision and mission of their parent institutions and also meet the information needs of their clientele.

2. The Nigerian Copyright Commission, in collaboration with the law enforcement agencies as well as the judiciary should embark on constantly raid, arrest and prosecute copyright offenders and abusers. It is envisaged that, this will stem the tide of high rate of intellectual theft, as this will stimulate intellectual activities thus giving a boom to writing and production of books and other information materials. Furthermore, there should be enlightenment and educative programmes on the media (radio and television) with a view to educating the citizenry on the grave implications of piracy of information materials.

3. Nigerian scholars should make genuine effort to carry out researches in their various areas of specializations and publish their findings as their contribution to knowledge, and not just for material gains. Wealthy individuals, organisations and governments should endeavour to sponsor researches in this regard. Locally produced books have the merits of local content and reduced cost.

4. The National library of Nigeria (NLN), shouldered with the responsibility of compiling and publishing the nation's publication output should be proactive and aggressive in the discharge of this statutory role. A current and comprehensive national bibliography is a priceless acquisition tool for librarians.

5. Academic libraries in Nigeria can collaborate through the formation of a consortium with a view to subscribing to quite a number of electronic databases as well as e-books. Equally, the consortium can purchase other information materials for the libraries as well. This is with a view to reducing to the barest minimum, the high cost of information resources, hardware, software and other peripheral devices connected with provision of robust, efficient, timely and useful information to users.

6. For challenges arising from poor and epileptic power system, academic libraries should explore alternative power supply as backup to complement the national grid. Solar energy, battery inverters as well as generators are other credible alternatives as power backup.

7. Academic library managers and their collaborators suspected to have embezzled or misappropriated funds budgeted for acquisition of information materials and other sharp practices should be thoroughly investigated and disciplined accordingly, if found guilty. This will serve as a deterrent to others who may be nursing such ugly ambition.

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