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# **EFFICACY OF VIRTUAL LIBRARY IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES TOWARDS THE ATTAINMENT OF VISION 20:2020.**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the necessity of establishing virtual libraries in Nigerian Universities as vital tools for achieving the national goal in higher education by the year 20:20 20. The paper notes that virtual libraries are essential assets for Nigerian universities through the provision of web base resources which facilitate teaching, learning and researches. It also highlights some challenges to include: inadequate professional librarians and erratic and insufficient power supply. In view of this, the paper also made some recommendations that will enable the government and the universities in Nigeria to achieve a functional education by the year 2020.*

## **Introduction**

The quest for a functional education does not start today, but since the early sixties, there has been a rising commitment by Nigerian government to strengthen the delivery of education. A functional education is a necessary asset for national development. Igbo (2008) noted that education enables one to contribute to the national development and growth, and he emphasized that necessary attention be given in terms of provision of human and material resources. Anuforo (2009) asserted that, "vision 20:2020" is Nigeria's quest to join the league of 20 industrialized nations of the world. For education sector to achieve its national objective by the year 20:20, there is need for the establishment of virtual libraries in Nigerian universities. Virtual libraries are virtually important to economic development by enhancing the participation of libraries in the global information society. This article discusses the efficacy of Nigerian universities virtual libraries towards the attainment of vision 20:20 20 and the challenges and prospects of virtual libraries are also highlighted.

### **Conceptual Consideration**

Virtual library is a concept that connotes “library without boundary”. Achebe (2008) described it as a type of library where in a number of different information resources are brought to end users through electronic networks. Omekwu (2002) viewed virtual library as libraries without wall that depend on virtually reality of technology. Ricco (2001), in support of this affirmed that virtual library is a library where in holdings are found in electronic stacks without any regard to physical space or location. A virtual library use a technological way of bringing together the resources of various libraries and information services in one place so that users can easily and quickly find what they want. The content of a virtual library varies in scope and context. From the above definition, it is seen that virtual library cannot exist without the existence of digital collections which would be the building block for the establishment of a virtual library.

### **Virtual Library Initiatives**

There are several virtual library initiatives in Nigeria. The National virtual (Digital) Library Projects of the Ministry of Education is supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The National virtual Library Projects of the Ministry of Science and Technology is supervised by the Nation IT Development Agency and there is currently an ongoing effort by UNESCO to develop virtual library for all Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria. Some Universities have already established virtual libraries and some of them are at the early stages of retrospective conversion of their local contents – establishing a digital collection.

Mac Ikemenjima (2005) summarized the objectives of the national virtual library to include:

- i. Improving the quality of teaching and research institutions through the provision of current books, journal and other library resources.
- ii. Enhancing access of academic libraries to global library and information resources.
- iii. Enhancing scholarship and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collections.
- iv. Provision of guidance to academic libraries in ways of applying appropriate technologies for the production of digital library resources and
- v. To advance the use and usability of globally distributed networks library resources.

With the introduction of virtual libraries in Nigerian universities, Gbaje (2007) noted that virtual library has provided a value added solution for all higher institutions and facilitated online access to an enormous current volume of academic information. The problem of scarcity of teaching and research materials in Nigerian University libraries is addressed through establishment of virtual libraries. This is so because, individual institutions and indigenous researchers are able to share their researches outputs with the global community, as well as ensuring the presentation of Nigeria cultural heritage.

Lawal and Ani (2001) posited that, the process of building a virtual library begins with digitization of non-digital local materials, acquisitions of electronic resources such as databases, e-books and journals through license and access to quality free web based resource.

### **Characteristics of a Virtual Library**

Sherwell (1997) listed the following as Key characteristics of a true virtual library:

- No corresponding physical collections
- Availability of documents in electronic formats
- Documents are not stored in any one location
- Retrieval and deliverance of documents as and when required
- Availability of effective searching and browsing facilities

Virtual library functions are in tandem with its purposes. Nevertheless, the following purposes are identified: To make learning and acquisition of knowledge easy by providing books, journals and other forms of information resources through information and communication technology based tools.

It spreads up the means of collecting, storing and organizing information and knowledge in a digital form. It makes possible a consortium database that is beneficial to students in a learning environment through linkage of numerous collections that exist between and among research institutions, and other organizations.

It also promotes economical and efficient delivery of information to all segments of the scholars in various campuses and schools. It provides scholarly publications. Scholars depend on the virtual library for literature search, to update their knowledge and skills.

### **Challenges of Virtual Library in Nigerian Universities**

It is common knowledge that computerization though necessary is a very expensive project. A fundamental problem facing most academic institutions in Nigeria which invariably affects the quality of their products is the deplorable state of the academic libraries. Teferra (2004) cited by Anasi (2010), captured vividly the sorry state of most academic libraries. He observed that:

....academic librarians for sometime now have found it increasingly difficult to acquire and make available to their users the full range of publications in print format they require and to which members of the university community might need access.

Similarly, the report on libraries in Nigerian federal universities commissioned by the National Universities commission (NUC) in 1990 cited by Ogunrombi (2003) indicated that the book stock of Nigerian university libraries is in a deplorable state such that the libraries can no longer support the academic programmes of their institutions. There is no remarkable improvement in the current state of most academic libraries as many of them are largely stocked with outdated books and journals. However, only academic libraries that are linked up to the World Wide Web can boast of significant

change and unfortunately, many tertiary institutions in Nigerian are yet to be connected to the internet. No doubt the quality of the library in any academic environment affects the quality of teaching, research and learning and this in turn, determines the quality of the output. The implementation of a virtual library implies that libraries will spend more money on computer hardware and software, training of librarians in new technologies especially in the area of texts selection, scanning, verification of the materials to be digitized as well as employment of experts with web technologies, and skills to support and manage them. Copyright holders have to be contracted and rights obtained. Money is needed to translate content into digital form and to access the resources. A powerful server is required, supported by specialized software and personnel. The server must operate all day and new materials should constantly be added.

Even though there is massive improvement in the telecommunication industry over the past few years, however a lot still needs to be done to improve its present state. There is also the problem of maintenance. This view is corroborated by Okoro (2008) who affirmed that great number of people have low maintenance culture. They lack the experience of regular system check to detect fault as timely as possible. The fact that technicians lack this culture, they wait until the equipment breaks down to the level of no repair, which invariably affects the system and halts any progress made in computer application in the execution of jobs.

Web technology skills are needed to maintain web servers that host locally digitized materials and other digital resources hosted remotely as well as maintaining proxy access to restricted resources. Aschcroft and Watts (2004) observed that Nigeria has an acute shortage of digital systems librarians, information and web technology literate staff in libraries to install and manage technology networks. In a similar view, Onyeneke (2007) added that one of the challenges is that of expertise, the constraints of expertise refer to the retraining of library staff so as to improve the ICT competency, lack if a system manager, support staff and ICT experts as well as low level of students ICT knowledge and skills. This view is similar to that of Okoro (2008) who asserted that many students do not have ICT skills to use the computer and as such, the web librarians should be the interface between digital libraries and the users but this not to be the case as Ani & Esin (2005) pointed out that there is a low level of ICT skills among librarians in Nigeria and most of them lack the requisite skills to function in the virtual environment.

The erratic nature of electronic power supply in Nigeria is a major problem as the virtual library cannot exist in this situation because web servers that host locally digitized contents and proxy server that provides authentication and remote access to subscribed electronic resources need to be on all day. Adebisi (2009) clarified this position by adding that infrastructural problems such as low bandwidth, poor power supply and constant computer breakdowns could mean non access to internet due to ineffective internet service provider (ISP) or breakdown of equipments. Distinct users interface of every product is another major challenge as users would have to remember different passwords for different products. The scope of coverage and available archives are often limited. The virtual library relies on power and computer networks in order to be available for use.

Lack of purpose built library buildings. Much provision was not initially made for information technological devices but with the emergence of information technology, renovation of the existing library buildings will need to be done to accommodate its new trends, facilitates and services. Another challenge is the lack of political will in the adoption and proper funding of information and communication technology. Sufficient interest is not demonstrated by the political class to implement the ICT policies and this, results in the lukewarm attitude of the government towards the technological development in the country.

### **Prospects of Virtual Libraries in Nigerian Universities**

Virtual libraries powered by digital technologies open doors for great possibilities and opportunities in higher education system in Nigeria. It is a technological innovation that promises a paradigm shift in teaching, research and learning which is indispensable especially with the present day technological advancement. The flexibility of learning it provides enhances and advances informal and distance learning in institutions. It gives the distance learner the opportunity to attain the highest level of education from their offices and homes. According to Anasi (2010), the deployment of digital libraries in higher education acts as a catalysts for change in this domain. Virtual libraries promote the emergence of an educational community that shares thousands and thousands of digital resources in a networked environment, thus virtual libraries encourage resource sharing among members of a scholarly community. In conventional educational setting, virtual libraries offer both teachers and students the opportunity to utilize digital resources and tools in different formats without being presents in the library. The information in digital format is more space saving and it is easier and cheaper to communicate via telephone over long distances.

The need for a virtual library system has therefore become the most urgent necessity in universities in Nigeria. Okebukola (2002) maintained that the virtual library would improve the quality of teaching and research in higher institutions through the provision of current e-books, journals and other library resources. This will enhance scholarship, research and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared virtual archival collections provide guidance to academic libraries on ways of applying appropriate technologies for the production of virtual library resources and to advance the use and usability of globally distributed networks of library networks. Digital libraries encourage authentic inquiry learning by providing students access to online resources and such resources permit students to enjoy a flexible learning arrangement which allows them to pursue their own interests within the bounds of the curriculum. Access to online resources implies that learners are free to participate in learning activities when time permits and such freedom had greatly increased the opportunities for many students to participate in higher education.

The uniqueness of the virtual library is that it is spaceless, since it requires the conversion of target library collections into electronic format and placed on the internet to e accessed by anybody anywhere. Duplication of efforts would be its own unique content, that is, each of them would have its own institutional repository. With the

existence of virtual libraries, electronic books and journal are made accessible to an unlimited audience at the same time, anytime and anywhere ( Ricco 2001). This implies that all library operations would be automated. A virtual library is a strategy to boost learning and open access to the electronic super highway in Nigerian universities.

### **The Role of the Virtual Library in Vision 20:20**

From ancient times till date, the library has been recognized as a catalyst of both formal and informal education. Formally, a library was simply seen as a storehouse of books maintained either for a specific purpose or for collection of purposes. In the present day, the virtual library has departed from such learning and is now a complex technological system. According to the National policy on Education (2004), the library is at the heart of the education enterprise and it is only by transmission of knowledge by each succeeding generation that civilization maintains itself and advances upon the knowledge of the past which is crucial to the betterment of the future. Education connotes the process of learning and teaching knowledge while knowledge refers to information and skills gathered through experience or education. It is a fact that everybody needs information for one service or the other.

### **Conclusion**

The virtual library has such facilities that when implemented, would assist the government to realize the objectives of education as specified in vision 2020 policy document. Some of these are that the virtual library is not limited by space and time, it is seamless, dynamic, integrative and interactive in nature. It allows for multiple, concurrent users at a time while in the traditional library system where there always exists the problem of a book missing or being used by another library patron. In other words, it is less labour intensive.

With virtual library, the quality of academic library collections will bolstered up, staff and students will be able to access databases for teaching and research and accessibility to recent publications will be enhanced and this is one of the ways that the establishment and maintenance of the virtual library can assist the federal government to achieve its educational objective. The importance / relevance of the virtual library cannot be underscored in the present technological era, with information explosion and several scientific and technological discoveries the hope of achieving vision 2020 objectives is obvious.

This paper recommends among other things that: the academic library should have to be computerized before it can go virtual. The government of the day would have to put in place policies and strategies to enhance the actualization of education objective which was listed in the vision 2020 policy document.

The virtual library could provide access to subscription of electronic resources, free web-based resources, locally digitized resources and open access resources. There is a need for libraries to seek for more grants and funds to upgrade or establish the necessary information infrastructures. Information in digital format is more space-saving, easier and cheaper to communicate via telephone over long distances. With the shift and emphasis on access rather than ownership, the cost of hardware and software



and lack of adequate web technology, skilled librarians make the formation of a library consortium very critical to building a successful virtual library project.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that higher education in Nigeria has a lot to gain by pinning the information super highway. The challenges may seem overwhelming but Waters (2001) recommended that the weaving of digital libraries into the fabric of higher education demands unswerving commitment. Thus, it is obvious therefore that the establishment and maintenance of academic libraries in tertiary institutions in Nigeria will go a long way to help the country attain its objectives listed under education in the vision 2020 policy document.

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