

ASSESSMENT OF DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS OF 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIANS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the digital literacy skills of librarians in university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study investigated the level of digital literacy skills possessed by librarians, their participation in training and the challenges faced. Four objectives and four research questions guided the study and three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A structured questionnaire titled: Assessment of digital literacy skills of librarians' (ADLSL) was administered to all 56 librarians in three university libraries using purposive and census sampling techniques. The instrument was validated by two experts and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96 using Cronbach Alpha. The data was analyzed using simple percentage for demographic data, mean and standard deviation for the research questions. The major findings of the study includes that academic librarians in university libraries in Benue State possess digital literacy skills, the librarians sponsor themselves to training on digital literacy, attend trainings at least twice a year and are motivated by the libraries' emphasis on digital literacy skill.

Keywords: *Digital literacy, Skills, Librarians, university libraries, Nigeria*

Introduction

Academic libraries play a vital role in supporting teaching, learning and research in higher education institutions. However, the advent of digital technology has brought about significant changes in the way libraries operate and the skills required by librarians. University Libraries are the libraries attached to universities to support teaching, learning and research of the community. The University library is the nerve center or the hub around which scholarship revolves. It is an indispensable instrument for intellectual development. The heart of every

university as it serves as a knowledge base for teaching, learning and research activities. The university library is an integral part of a higher institution. Adeniran (2013) defined a University Library as that which is attached to academic institutions of learning to serve the teaching and research needs of students and staff. Relatedly, Eze and Uzoigwe (2013), saw a university library as the heart of the university using any material resources at its disposal to support teaching, learning and research objectives of the institution. They are the repositories of information and knowledge from all fields of learning relevant to the academic community which they serve (Enweani, 2018). Its primary purpose is to offer academic and research services in support of the programs of the university of which it is a part. The function of university libraries can be summarized as thus; to organize knowledge for easy storage and retrieval.

Digital literacy refers to the ability to evaluate and use digital information resources, digital tools and online services effectively (Ukachi, 2010). In the context of academic libraries, digital literacy skills are crucial for librarians to provide timely and adequate information resources to students, lecturers and researchers. Digital literacy skills are essential for librarians to effectively navigate the digital landscape and provide quality services to their users. The importance of digital literacy skills for librarians cannot be overemphasized. With the increasing demand for digital information resources, librarians need to be equipped with the necessary skills to meet the needs of users. This study aims to assess the digital literacy skills of librarians in university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. By exploring the digital literacy skills of librarians, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the role of digital literacy in academic libraries and inform strategies for improving the digital literacy skills of librarians.

The findings of this study will be beneficial to three groups of people: Librarians, students and researchers. For Librarians, the findings highlights the importance of acquiring digital and visual literacy skills, which can enhance their job performance, career advancement, and ability to support users. By embracing these skills, librarians can effectively utilize digital tools, facilitate resource sharing and provide better assistance to users.

The findings of this study will benefit students and researchers by enabling librarians to provide more efficient and effective support, thereby saving the time of the user and facilitate their research work. This aligns with Dr. Raganathan's fourth law of librarianship, "save the time of the user". Furthermore, this study will contribute to the existing body of literature on digital literacy in librarianship, providing valuable insights for professionals and researchers in the field. By exploring the significance of digital literacy skills, this study aims to promote a better understanding of the role of librarians in the digital age.

The study investigates the digital literacy skills of librarians in university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, it focuses on three public universities: Benue State University Makurdi, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi and Federal University of Health Sciences, Otuokpo. The study aims to: identify the digital literacy skills possessed by academic librarians in these universities, explore how librarians in these university acquire their digital literacy skills, determine the frequency of ICT training for librarians and assess the motivation level of academic library staff in using digital literacy.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid proliferation of information, globalization, and advancements in digital technology have transformed the world into a global village, emphasizing the importance of

digital literacy. The increasing demand for digital information services in university libraries in Benue State has created a need for librarians to possess advanced digital literacy skills. However, there is a growing concern that many librarians in these institutions may not have the necessary digital skills to effectively provide digital information services to their patrons. This concern is exacerbated by the fact that many university libraries in Benue state are facing challenges in providing digital information services due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel. As a result, patrons may not have access to the digital information resources they need to support their academic pursuits.

Specifically, many academic librarians in Nigeria struggle with basic computer skills, internet navigation, email management, and accessing digital information. This deficiency hinders their ability to manage and provide access to both print and electronic resources, ultimately affecting the quality of service delivery to library users. Therefore, this study aims to assess the digital literacy skills of librarians in university libraries in Benue state, Nigeria with a view to identifying the gaps in their digital literacy skills and providing recommendations for improving their skills.

Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to investigate the digital literacy skills possessed by librarians in public university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. What digital literacy skills do academic librarians in university libraries in Benue State possess?
- ii. What are the methods of acquiring digital literacy skills among librarians in university libraries in Benue State acquire digital literacy skills?
- iii. What is the frequency of ICT training for librarians in university libraries in Benue State?

- iv. What is the motivation level of academic library staff in using digital literacy skills in university libraries in Benue State?

Review of Related Literature

The university library is the nerve center of every university. Edom (2013) defined university library as a repository of great thinkers of the past and the present. Its primary purpose is to offer academic and research services in support of the programs of the university of which it is a part. The function of university libraries can be summarized as thus; to organize knowledge for easy storage and retrieval. Libraries either digital or traditional are manned by trained personnel known as librarians. Academic librarians are well trained information professionals who offer support to the lecturers, students and researchers of higher institution through the provision of timely and adequate information resources, and the conducive platform for maximum utilization. Thus, they are encouraged to embrace and apply digital literacy skills on their jobs more than ever before because of the dynamic changes in the information world. Libraries are of different types. Lecturers and students from all discipline and of course all library users demand easy access to information and the internet has become a viable asset to all and sundry.

The phrase, digital literacy exceeds the normal information technology skills that explains a richer set of digital practices, identities and behaviors. The idea of digital literacy changes as time changes. Digital literacy is defined as a set of professional and academic practices triggered by the changes in modern technologies” (JISC, 2014). Digital literacy proficiency was in any case situated at the heart, thus, linking together data, information, media literacies, digital creation, digital communication, problem solving and innovation, participation and collaboration, digital learning and development. The capability of individuals to use

technology to create, navigate, disseminate, evaluate and store information is basically described as digital literacy. It is just a set of necessary competencies needed for adequate participation in a society that is knowledge based.

Digital literacy has to do with skills, knowledge, and behaviors that involve effective and efficient use of digital devices like smartphones, tablets, iphones, laptops, ipads and desktop PCs for purposes of collaboration, communication, expression, advocacy and even decision making. According to Ofilli, (2017), a digital literate person should have the knowledge and skills to use traditional computers, such as desktop PCs and laptops - computer literacy, he should be able to objectively analyze facts to form accurate judgment- critical thinking, he must have the ability to engage in online communities meetings and social networks while in obedience to behavioral protocols, possess the capability to find, capture, disseminate and evaluate information. Such a person should have the capability to understand the emerging societal issues caused by the evolution of digital technologies and possess critical thinking skills. He should also possess a range of digital skills, know the basic principles of computing devices, and possess adequate skills in handling computer networks and the internet. This study therefore, conceptualizes digital literacy as, a necessary set of skills an individual must compulsorily possess in order to navigate the Internet; find online information, manage, edit and store digital information; join in communications; in other words engage with any desired online information and communication network.

Digital literacy skills of librarians are those technological and or computer skills and knowledge required by librarians to be able to fully exploit information services in digital environment. Oyedokun, et al. (2018) viewed digital literacy skills of library staff to be those

relevant skills and knowledge acquired by those working in the library to be able to fully exploit information search, retrieval, and delivery using electronic format. According to Ojiegbe (2010), it is demonstrating the knowledge, skills, experience and attributes necessary to carry out a defined function effectively. It is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities at a level of expertise sufficient to be able to perform appropriately and professionally a given task in a work place. Digital literacy skills are one of the most essential in daily work procedures and the fastest expanding skill sets today, and are currently in huge demand across multiple markets (Buarki, 2015). Digital literacy skills according Nsirim (2021) are those technological and or computer skills and knowledge required by librarians to be able to fully exploit information services in the wake of new technology. Oyedokun et al. (2018) viewed digital literacy skills competencies of library staff to be those relevant skills and knowledge to be acquired by those working in the library to be able to fully exploit information search, retrieval, and delivery using electronic format. It is demonstrating the knowledge, skills, experience and attributes necessary to carry out a defined function effectively. Digital literacy simply put is the ability to evaluate and use digital information resources, digital tools and online services and apply them effectively to the lifelong learning process. In clear terms, digital literacy empowers professionals of all works of life (including librarians) to possess the necessary skills that improve their economic and social status and improve the quality and output of their overall job performance and living standard. In the words of Cooke (2012), librarians need not only to be as savvy as their clients but even savvier than their clients because, the ethics of the profession demand it. As a necessary ingredient, digital literacy skill is inevitably required by academic librarians for career progression and job expertise.

The most important aspect of digital literacy is the ability to make informed judgments about information found online for just like conventional media, much digital information found online is unfiltered by editors and left open to the contribution of all and sundry. Such digital information becomes adequately evaluated, relevant and useful to the user when it passes through the library.

Susan (2011) observed that, library professionals has a positive approach towards ICT applications and services in libraries, but majority do not have the opportunities to develop their skills and competencies in their work environment. Nevertheless, they need to enhance their digital literacy skills and to implement these skills in libraries to provide new ICT based library services to their patrons. They suggested that the library management should motivate the library and information science professionals to update the digital literacy skills. Edam-Agbor and Egbe (2019) recommended the essential digital literacy skills every information manager needs, to keep up with the demands of the present job landscape. Although the aforementioned skills according to Omehia et al. (2021) are necessary for effective services delivery, the challenge is how to harness these skills for effective library services delivery.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of digital literacy skills for librarians. Saunders (2015) found out that librarians need to possess a range of digital literacy skills, including technical skills, information literacy skills, and critical thinking skills. Okiy (2015) in her studies found out that librarians in Nigerian university libraries lacked the necessary digital literacy skills to effectively provide digital information services. Lawal (2017) carried out a research on digital literacy and found that most of the students studied possessed digital literacy skills. The present study derives from Lawal's because both studies dwell on digital literacy

skills. The present study however, differs from the former because it studies librarians while the former studied students (users). The increasing dominance and explosion of digital content has prompted information managers to redefine themselves over time. This study is in agreement with the findings of Emiri (2015) which states that, Librarians acquired DLS through colleague's assistance, trial and error, IT programmes, self-sponsorship and personal efforts. Both Emiri's study and the present study used academic librarians in Government owned universities as its population. The findings of this study agrees with the findings of Nwankwo, Obiadazie and Ofordile (2019) which revealed that librarians attend trainings not more than twice per year.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 76 which comprised librarians in the five university libraries in Benue State from which purposive sampling technique was used to select three university libraries in Benue State. Census sampling technique was adopted where all the 56 librarians in the three university libraries were used as the sample. A structured questionnaire titled: Assessment of digital literacy skills of century librarians' (ADLSCL) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts to ascertain the face validity. A trial testing technique was adopted to ensure the reliability of the instrument while Cronbach Alpha was used to analyze the data. The output yielded the Alpha coefficient of 0.96. Out of 56 copies of the questionnaire administered, 52 copies were found valid for analysis. The data was analyzed using simple percentage for demographic data, mean and standard deviation for the research questions.

Findings

Research Question 1: What digital literacy skills do academic librarians in university libraries in Benue State possess?

Table 1: Responses on digital literacy skills possessed by librarians in university libraries

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
1	I can use digital devises such as laptops, smartphones, ipads, desktops	3.67	Accepted
2	I can analyze facts objectively	2.50	Accepted
3	I have the ability to engage in online communities	2.50	Accepted
4	I network with other colleagues via computers	2.69	Accepted
5	I can find and evaluate online information	2.90	Accepted
6	I possess critical thinking skills	3.50	Accepted
7	I have an email and I am a member of NLA online	3.21	Accepted
8	I enjoy blogging on the website	2.43	Rejected
9	I can navigate databases properly	2.71	Accepted
10	I belong to social networks like linkedln, facebook	3.65	Accepted
11	I know how to share resource with other colleagues online	1.56	Rejected
12	I participate in Professional online Webinar meetings	2.00	Rejected

Out of the twelve items presented on Table one, nine items were accepted by the respondents while three items were rejected. Item 1(I can use digital devises such as laptops, smartphones, ipads, desktops etc) has the highest acceptance with the mean score of 3.67. It was closely followed by item 10 (I belong to social networks like linkedln, facebook etc.) 6 (I possess critical thinking skills), and 7 (I have an email and I am a member of NLA online) with mean scores of 3.65, 3.50, 3.21 respectively. Items 2 (I can analyze facts objectively) and 3 (I have the ability to engage in online communities) have the lowest acceptance with the mean scores of 2.50 each. Item 12 (I know how to share resource with other colleagues online) has the highest rejection with the mean score of 1.56, while item 8 (I enjoy blogging on the website) has the lowest rejection. The present study agrees with the findings of Lawal, (2017) who carried out a

research on digital literacy and found that most of the students studied possessed digital literacy skills.

Research Question 2: what are the methods of acquiring digital literacy skills among librarians in university libraries in Benue State acquire digital literacy skills?

Table 2: Methods of acquiring digital literacy skills.

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
1	I attend formal training programs	2.50	Accepted
2	My office organizes computer training for staff	2.50	Accepted
3	I attend online training courses	2.89	Accepted
4	I attend professional conferences	2.68	Accepted
5	I enrolled in private computer training	3.00	Accepted
6	I sponsor myself to digital literacy training workshops	3.41	Accepted

The analysis on Table 2 shows that all the six items depicting how the librarians acquire digital literacy skills were accepted by the respondents. Item 6 (I sponsor myself to digital literacy training workshops) has the highest acceptance with the mean score of 3.41. It is closely followed by item 5 (I enrolled in private computer training) which has the mean of 3.00. Meanwhile, item 1 (I attend formal training programs) and 2 (My office organizes computer training for staff) have the lowest acceptance with respective mean scores of 2.50 each. The librarians studied accepted all the means of acquisition of digital literacy skills listed. This finding reveals that the professional librarians working in university libraries in Benue State of Nigeria, acquire digital literacy skills out of their own personal efforts. The university hardly sponsors them in professional development. This finding tallies with the findings of Emiri (2015) which states that, Librarians acquired DLS through colleague's assistance, trial and error, IT programmes, self-sponsorship and personal efforts.

Research Question 3: What is the frequency of ICT training for librarians in university libraries in Benue State?

Table 3: Librarians responses on frequency of ICT training

S/N DECISION	ITEM	MEAN	
1	I go for training every month	2.54	Accepted
2	I attend training twice a year	2.90	Accepted
3	I attend trainings once in a while	2.68	Accepted
4	When the need arises	2.50	Accepted
5	Only when my institution sponsors me	1.23	Rejected
6	I do not attend trainings	1.00	Rejected

The result on Table 3 above shows that out of the six items presented, two were rejected while four were accepted by the respondents. Item number 2 (I attend training twice a year.) has the highest acceptance with the mean score of 2.90. Item 4 (When the need arises) has the lowest acceptance with the mean of 2.50. Item number 6 (I do not attend trainings) has the highest rejection with the mean score of 1.00. From Table 3, the results revealed that majority of librarians attend training on digital literacy skill acquisition mostly twice a year. This could be because the management does not offer them financial sponsorship. Two times a year is the much their personal resources can afford for them. This finding agrees with the findings of Nwankwo, Obiadazie, & Ofordile, (2019) who revealed that librarians attend trainings not more than twice per year.

Research Question 4: what is the motivation level of academic library staff in using digital literacy skills in university libraries in Benue State?

Table 4: Motivation level of academic librarians in using digital literacy skills.

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
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1	I am self-motivated on this career	3.56	Accepted
2	I appreciate my relationship with my boss and colleagues	3.50	Accepted
3	I learn every day on the job and I have progressed in my career	3.00	Accepted
4	My library's emphasis on digital literacy skill motivates me	4.00	Accepted
5	I am well motivated by my institution on librarianship career	2.57	Accepted
6	I feel confident that I can adapt to new digital technologies	2.81	Accepted

Table 4 shows the responses on if digital literacy skills possessed by academic librarians motivate them on their jobs. All the 6 items presented were accepted by the respondents. Item 4 (My library's emphasis on digital literacy skill motivates me) has the highest acceptance with the mean of 4.00. It is closely followed by items 1 (I am self-motivated on this career), 2 (I appreciate my relationship with my boss and colleagues), 3 (I learn every day on the job and I have progressed in my career) with respective mean scores of 3.56, 3.50, and 3.00. Items 5 (I am well motivated by my institution on librarianship) and 6 (I feel confident that I can adapt to new digital technologies) have the lowest acceptance with their respective mean scores of 2.57 and 2.81. The result presented on Table 4 reveals that the librarians are highly motivated while applying their digital literacy skills on their job. This finding shows that the academic librarians in the three university libraries in Benue State of Nigeria are mostly computer literate. This finding agrees with the findings of Nwankwo, Ofordile, & Ofor, (2019) who carried out a research and discovered that information literacy skills serves as a great motivation to librarians.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, this study made recommendations as follows;

1. Professional librarians and other supporting library staff working in university libraries in Benue State should make serious efforts towards acquiring all the digital literacy skills required for perfect library service delivery.
2. Private university library management in Benue State should always provide financial sponsorship for the academic librarians for digital literacy skill acquisition and also professional development in general.
3. Librarians should attend trainings on digital literacy skills more often.
4. Efforts should be made by the library management and the librarians to intensify the job motivation enjoyed by the librarians' application of digital literacy skills on their jobs.

Conclusions

Smooth career progression and competent service delivery are facilitated by the acquisition of digital literacy skills among professional librarians working in private or public university libraries. Librarians are charged with the primary duty of meeting the information needs of the library patron. To effectively accomplish this mission, the librarian must possess the necessary digital literacy skills. Universities being the parent organizations to university libraries, should equip academic librarians with the necessary skills to accomplish the universities' mission which normally includes teaching, learning and research. Academic librarians are asset to academic libraries; therefore development of digital literacy skills will enhance the productivity level competencies of the academic librarians which will determine to a

large extent how effectively they should be able to perform their duties and carry out routine jobs in the library. Librarians are happy working in automated libraries, when highly motivated and will perform their jobs with satisfaction and achieve progress in their career. The study thus concluded that, problems with the acquisition and utilization of these digital skills should not just be checked but also corrected.

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