

# ENHANCING ACCESS TO SOCIAL SCIENCE RESOURCES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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## **Abstract**

The university library is identified as the nerve centre of any university for study, teaching and research. Departments that constitute Social Science Faculty, which may vary from one university to another are given. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this paper is the application of computers, CO-ROMS and the Internet in Nigerian university libraries. The benefits of ICT resources are discussed in detail and linked to some library procedures such as acquisitions, processing, circulation and reference services for enhanced access to social science resources by patrons. Formal and informal education and training for staff and students as well as adequate power supply are considered necessary requirements for ICT-based Social Science libraries in Nigerian universities. The paper concludes by suggesting adequate funding for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for enhanced access to Social Science resources.

The university library is the nerve centre of the university for study, teaching and research. According to Aina (2004) the university libraries are for students, lecturers, non-teaching staff and members of the local community in which the university is located. Information and communication technology in the context of this paper is the use of computers, CR-ROM and the Internet in the acquisition, processing, circulation and reference services for social sciences. The concept of Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) in libraries is the use of computers and other technologies in the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information (Nkiko, Ilo and Osayande, 2008).

Ukodie (2003) asserted that Information and Communication Technology is the engine of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. It will open doors of possibilities and opportunities for nations and their people, yet in the same breath confine nations that are yet not effectively put in the matrix of global information order in cocoons.

The primary aim of any technological innovation is to make life easier for mankind. For instance, the primary aim of innovation of cars and aeroplanes is to ease transportation. In the same vein, the application of ICT in libraries is to make information handling easier for librarians and patrons.

## **Department of Social Science**

The departments that make up the Faculty of Social Sciences may vary from one university to another depending on their needs and circumstances. The data below gives information on the scenario in Ebonyi State University Abakaliki.

**The Table Below Shows Departments that Made up Faculty of Social Sciences in Ebonyi State University.**

S/N	Departments	No of students	No of lecturers	No of non-teaching staff
1.	Economics	743	19	6
2.	Mass Communication	536	19	11
3.	Political science	518	14	5
4.	Psychology	181	10	6
5.	Sociology	436	14	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,414</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>34</b>

Source: The above data was collected from Faculty of Social Sciences EBSU.

As stated earlier, the university library is established primarily for students, lecturers and non-teaching staff of the mother institution for study, teaching, and research. From the table, Ebonyi State University library provides resources and services to 2,414 students, 74 lecturers, and 34 non-teaching staff through faculty of social science library. Other users in need of social science resources from the local community which is Ebonyi State and beyond can also use the resources of the library. Social science resources include numerous printed books and journals as well as reference books such as encyclopedias and dictionaries. Indexes and abstracts in social sciences are also important resources due to the large amount of information they contain on the subject field.

Nowadays, some of the resources in social sciences are in electronic forms e-books and e-journals for enhanced access by patrons in general and library staff in particular. Electronic books and electronic journals offer distinct advantages over their paper counterparts in the following ways:

1. Availability to users including for distant users from home and office computers.

2. Saving to the library in terms of storage and re-binding cost.

Some of the social science resources are in electronic forms. Chigbo (2003) reported that the library of the university of western Australia devotes 80% of its expenditure on information resources in electronic form which shows the increasing popularity of resources in electronic formats in libraries and information centres.

**Benefits of Electronic Resources**

The advantages of electronic resources is discussed here in relation to librarians and patrons. Aina (2004) noted that in modern librarianship, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has radically transformed most of the services provided by the library for the benefit of clientele. Cochrane (1992) outlined the benefits of ICT application in libraries to include:

1. Avoidance of duplication
2. Speedy and easy access to information.
3. Facilitates cooperation.
4. Enormous storage capacity
5. Information not fixed.
6. Easy up-dating.
7. Round the clock access to information

**Avoidance of Duplication**

A computerized library will reduce the incident of unnecessary duplication in the acquisition of new-titles in social sciences. This is because in library an on-order can easily be checked in a computerized library catalogue. Some publishers' catalogue are in CD-ROM for easy acquisition of social science resources. Also duplication of class marks in resources are preventable in a computerized university library.

**Speedy and Easy Access to Information**

Social science resources in a library can easily be accessed and utilized by patrons. For instance, a computerized catalogue can give information of the status of a book vis-à-vis

availability and or on loan. In this way circulation procedures are made unimaginably simple.

#### **Facilitates Co-operation**

A library needs inter-library cooperation to achieve the goals of collection development in the social sciences. No matter how much money a library has to itself, it remains impossible to acquire every publication in a discipline (Ekuoye, 2000). Inter-library cooperation has been enhanced by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) especially the Internet as billions of information can be accessed readily by users from other libraries that are connected to the web.

#### **Enormous Storage Capacity**

Enormous storage capacity of electronic facilities is more pronounced with CD-ROM and the Internet. Nwali (1991) reported the enormous storage capacity of CD-ROM and recommended its use in library and information centres in Nigeria. Ritzler (1989) further noted the enormous storage capacity of CD-ROMs of which 250,000 bibliographic abstracts can be stored in one 12cm (4.72inch) diameter disc compared to 1,600 floppy discs. A twenty volume encyclopedia can be stored in one CD-ROM disc the size of a saucer. Where the internet is involved, the capacity is limitless as billions of information in different formats can be accessed by users in the social sciences. Hence the enormous storage capacity of electronic formats become very important to the reference librarian dealing with bulky publications such as encyclopedia and dictionaries. Aina (2004) opined that nowadays many of the reference resources are in electronic format especially CD-ROMS and the internet.

#### **Information Not Fixed**

Information in an electronic form such as the internet is not fixed as in printed works.

Hence, they can be sorted out and reshuffled to meet users needs and circumstances.

#### **Easy Up-Dating**

CD-ROMS and Internet information can easily be updated for new edition. Hence, buying an updated CD-ROMS in social sciences could be linked to the purchase of new editions of books on the subject as and when they are published.

#### **Round the Clock Access to Information**

Electronic form such as CD-ROMS and the internet provide access to social science resources to students and staff 24hours from rooms and offices where there is a computer terminal that is linked to the web.

#### **ICT-Based Social Science Libraries in Nigeria**

Requirements for ICT-based social science libraries in Nigeria include education and training for staff and students, adequate power supply as well as adequate funding for ICT infrastructures. These factors when adequately handled will ensure functional social science libraries through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Education and training here involves formal and informal education and training in computer literacy, CD-ROM and Internet. Formal education and training could be achieved in universities and colleges as well as computer based organizations for degrees, higher degrees diplomas and certificates in computer related fields.

Conferences, seminars and workshops are classified as informal education and training. Nwali (2003) is of the view that only few people can take time off to go to high institutions for formal education and training. Hence conferences, seminars and workshops are means of achieving urgent educational and professional goals in an organization.

This conference by the Association for Encouraging Qualitative Education in Nigeria (ASSEQEN) held in Abakaliki Ebonyi State is a typical example of informal education and training for participants which includes students, staff and librarians in social sciences in Nigeria. The theme of the conference is Education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigerian Educational System: The journey so far. From the theme of the conference, it is a means of human capacity building in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Wiley Professional Development Programmes (1990) recognizes the fact that the staff development through formal and informal education and training could be high in terms of time and money. But was quick to point out that such education and training should be viewed as an investment in human capital in the organization rather than additional expenses.

### Conclusion

As stated earlier the essence of any technology is to make life easier for mankind. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is no exception in this regard. Hence, the concept of ICT was developed to ease information handling by managers and patrons which include those in social sciences. But no system under the sun can work out the necessary wherewithal. Therefore, proprietors and managers of universities should have the political will to provide adequate funding for ICT in Nigerian University libraries. This is because money is needed for e-books and e-journals, uninterrupted power supply through back-ups to the national grid as in the use of standby generators. Money is also required for staff development through formal and informal education and ICT as well as for ICT infrastructures such as computers, CD-ROMS and internet connectivity. Without necessary funds, enhancing access to social science

resources through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will be mere dream.

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