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RESEARCH ARTICLE

RECENT ADVANCES IN LAW LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

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Abstract:

This paper focused on ways by which law library services in Nigeria can be enhanced in the 21st century judging by the recent advances in the technological innovations that can be deployed to improve services. The objective was borne out of the observed low patronage of law libraries, moribund techniques and methods of rendering services and attitudes of law library staff to clients. The methodology was of qualitative type perusing literature on subject matter to get the general overview of the concept of law library services in the 21st century. The paper posited that information and communication technology adoption, extension of law library opening and closing hours and resource sharing through consortium will enhance improved law library services. The paper however concluded that the traditional library services such as collection of physical books should not be substituted with electronic resources rather there should be hybrid librarianship.

Introduction:-

Law library services are support services in the promotion of lawyering or legal practice. Lawyers, though learned, have more need of these services than when they were students. More than the last century, prospective lawyers and practicing, as well, would need more library services to continue their lifelong learning. The quest for originality might warrant an associate of a firm to visit to the library to search out a non-obvious theory to an intractable legal problem. That may sound like the kind of duty that all associates should assume. However, the idea of signature strengths is that some associates are better suited to library work, and others to different roles at the firm, even though they must all have a commitment to legal analysis (Seligman, zVerkuil, P.R. & Kang, 2001).

According to Mangham and Webb (1995), lawyers work in a hostile environment which is not conducive in carrying out detailed research. Legal information is considered one of the essential ingredients for effective justice to be done in any democratic society. In our day-to-day life, legal issues have become an integral part of our environment (TuhumwireI & Okello-Obura, (2010). Lawyers, particularly in Nigeria, tend not to have adequately used the existing library facilities maximally due to many of them not having good reading behaviour, not inquiring enough and, not adequately imbibing the need and skill of research and library use, in their undergraduate days, in their studies at the law school, in their court attachment and, chambers attachment (Adewale & Mansor, 2014).

More of the few inquiring legal practitioners who are concentrated in Nigeria's major cities seem to be exerting pressure on the few available law libraries. Even in the cities, the frequency with which lawyers visit the law libraries is reduced because the libraries are perceived to only hold dirty and old material (text and journals). Moreover, the services offered are often dull (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006 & Onwudijo, 2015). A well-equipped law library may serve as an alternative to a physical classroom for the training and retraining of lawyers. This position was supported by the editorial in *The Guardian* newspaper of Friday, May 5, 2000 which stated that:

The opinion that the Council of Legal Education and the Body of Benchers who took the decision to ban part-time law on the ground that part-time graduates 'do not measure up to the minimum standard of professionalism and proficiency expected of lawyers' is a hasty action.

This paper aligns with *The Guardian's* position and considers the decision of the Council of Legal Education and the Body of Bencher hasty because the intention to eradicate mediocrity may be defeated if the Faculties of Law's Library services are re-examined; the services of the Law School Libraries are improved; the

services of the Courts and Ministry of Justice Libraries are refined and; it is ensured that Chambers have functional and well equipped libraries. These are pointers to the fact that the objectives aimed at banning of the part-time degree programme in Law may be revisited if the aforementioned observations are taken into consideration.

It is germane that it is not only lawyers that need law library services, as it serves the research interests of other groups such as judges, librarians, litigation clerks, law school teachers and students, accountants, tax consultants, and even private individuals. Thus the interests that law libraries serve largely determine the type of organization, information media, equipment and services they would keep and circulate.

It is however important that libraries improve professionally (*The Guardian*, 2005). This paper thus opines that the perceived mediocrity in legal practice, especially in Nigeria, can be checked if there is a due appreciation or acknowledgement of the place of law libraries. Law libraries in the country, if properly equipped and utilized, will bring an enduring remedy to the declining professionalism in legal practice – and lawyering generally – and it is on this premise that this paper proposes recent advances that can enhance law library services, in Nigeria, in the 21st century.

Functions of the 21st Century Law Library:-

The major function of a law library is communicating library services and products to its users, providing requested information and assessing user's needs. In times of increasing numbers of information resources and decreasing funds, it is more important than ever that law libraries devise means of communicating law library services to its users. Ever since the problem of the literature explosion became noticeable in the 1970's, the developed world has devised various systems to facilitate the flow of information both within and across the countries and developing countries are invited to take advantage of these devices (Mamza & Bassi, 2014). The 21st century law library should provide such services to its users that will enable them use their library 24 hours of the day, anywhere in and outside the library. This way, the library would become a mobile tool for all the library patrons (Madukoma, 2015). These aforementioned tasks can only be achieved through the application of modern technology in the law library. The case of application of modern technology in the law library should start with the acceptance of the new technology as vital to the effective performance of the functions of the law library. The use of communication tools such as e-mail, fax, computer, and video conferencing overcomes barriers of space and time, and opens new possibilities of communicating law library services to its users. According to Ukoh (1984), application of modern technology in the library brings computer to mind. The computer has made a huge impact on the general library management. The law library should therefore make use of the modern day information media and services.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

According to Oguniola (2004), the use of IT as a strategic management and cognitive tool is critically important if Nigerian universities wish to be run effectively, access information through worldwide networks, and be globally competitive.

With a 21st century compliant law library, the law library patron sees where he is lacking, what information he is missing and what abilities he would lack if he did not read. The law library user becomes more professional and efficient in leading an organized life. For the law library to cope with this trend in this century, every law library needs the new media and information communication technology. The computers will aid librarians to adequately manage legal knowledge and paper proliferation in legal practice. The librarians on their part would teach the user every access mechanism to facilitate fast and easy retrieval. The literature acquired and organized for dissemination should not only be current but also reflect the level of knowledge growth in the legal profession.

The law library would need to provide the following services to their patrons in this century:

Film services: In the case of law school and court libraries, some rooms should be set aside in which works put on films strips and reels would be kept with the needed equipment to make the films and strips functional. These libraries or their parent institution should also consider microfilming their prized printed materials and old newspapers. For chambers, they need not reserve any room for the microforms and their aids; rather they should be neatly packed, stored and made available for use when needed. Officers put in charge of these services should draw a timetable that would permit users to view and learn the use of these services. These films though catalogued

among other library materials should be kept under lock and key. However, these strips and reel should be converted and stored in modern storage devices like memory cards and DVDs which should be kept away along with the films.

Video and Audio Services: The arrangement and advantages of these services are similar to those of the film services. But unlike the film services that require a team to watch a single film work at a time and a professional to put the machine in place, different video and audio devices could be viewed and listened to at the same time when earphones are used. The video could be used to record live events in courts, which can then be played back for patrons to gain professional experiences. Video/audio CDs, memory cards and other storage devices can be used for this purpose. The audio device, essentially, can be used to record lectures for use in law school libraries, record court proceedings for professional experience and also record oral histories. Audio CDs and other memory devices can be used to store these information for future use. The devices should be described and catalogued like film and other library materials.

Internet Services: The worldwide web continues to change the manner in which libraries provide services. It makes provision of services to patrons easier and less cumbersome. To attract and keep law library patrons in an increasingly networked environment, law libraries should establish new web-based electronic services.

There are several advantages to using technology within law libraries. The ability to update information instantaneously allows law librarians to keep informational resources as current as possible. Another advantage is that law library patrons can access web-based resources which the law library must have subscribed to, from where ever they can gain access to the internet and a web browser. Here, the library is made mobile.

Photocopying: Photocopying services should be made available to law library patrons. This service can be extended to copying into client's portable storage devices. Users can download whatever resources that catches their interest, download such information into their storage devices for use at their convenience.

Discussion room(s): There should be rooms for discussions of professional values that enhance or reinforce students' and legal practitioners' research and analytical abilities.

Rooms for Games: The television room can serve this function in small law firms. Beside the lighter mood literature in the law library, games such as scrabble, chess which are available in the computer, can also be made available in hard forms for recreational effect.

Display Centre: This could also be same as games rooms in a chambers' libraries. This section is intended to encourage patrons to browse. This is possible where inviting display furniture is used. Examples of such display mechanism are:

A. Versatile Audio Cassette/CD Display: with this in the browsing unit, about 63 talking books or 105 audio cassettes/CDs face-on are made available. This furniture besides being manufactured from a light weight yet durable steel, is space-saving.

B. Video Display: This can come in the form of a video wall unit or video spinner. On the average, either of these can adequately display an average 90 VHS videos. Projectors can also be used for PowerPoint presentation. These furniture, besides being manufactured from similar materials as above, are designed to display both the spine and the front cover for easy selection.

C. Rotating Tower display: This is an independently rotating tower for convenient and attractive display of paperback, wide cassettes or book-on tapes.

Digital information in the law library: The 21st century may be termed the age of library digitization with emphasis on resource sharing and the formation of library consortia. The formation of library consortia enables participating libraries to share their resources nationally and internationally. It is therefore important that law libraries digitize their collections, create their own databases and activate their Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), which is fast replacing the manual card catalogue, as it enables users to have easy access to library holdings through the computer. It enhances easier searches and retrievals of materials than the manual card catalogue.

Law libraries need to improve on their communication technologies. The end result is that member libraries of the consortia can access one another's libraries electronically so that preferred documents can be delivered

electronically. Digitization allows collections to be accessed regardless of location (remote access). Hence, Jacobson (1991) avers succinctly that searching for information has become “inexorably linked to computer technology.” Hence, any library that has not yet considered the option of automation and digitization will obviously be left behind in this century (Ekwelem, Okafor & Ukwoma, 2011). It is therefore imperative for all law libraries, considering the unique nature of the legal profession – and the importance of the library to lawyers – to be appropriately equipped to cope with the challenges/needs of the 21st century digital technology.

Other services provided by the 21st century law library should include:-

Electronic resources for easy access to relevant materials: There are several electronic resources available for use on the Internet apart from general search engines like:

- (a) www.google.com
- (b) www.lycos.com
- (c) www.infoseek.com
- (d) www.mama.com
- (e) www.excite.com

And specialized search engines for law like:

- a) www.nigeria-law.org/
- b) www.41alegal.org/
- c) www.hg.org/firms-nigeria.html
- d) www.loc.gov/law/guide/nigeria.html
- e) www.eninews.com/nigeria
- f) www.hurilaws.org/team.html
- g) www.showcase.netins.net/web
- h) www.creative/lincoln/speeches/lawlect.html
- i) www.lawteacher.net
- j) www.lawschool.westlaw.com/research/instructionalaid.asp
- k) www.venables.co.uk/studentresources.html
- l) www.lawtips.com
- m) www.legallibraries.com
- n) www.nigerialawreports.com

There are also online archives/databases that provide for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literatures around the world:

- (a) JSTOR – Caters for several disciplines and has materials relevant to the law profession. www.jstor.org.
- (b) ALUKA – A digital library of scholarly resources, also relevant for the law profession depending on the area of interest of the patron. www.aluka.org.
- (c) LEXIS/NEXIS – A specialized electronic resources containing newspaper articles and law information, LexisNexis describes itself as the “world’s largest collection of public records, published opinions, forms, legal, news, and business information” and targets its products to a wide range of professionals in the legal, risk management, corporate, government, law enforcement, accounting and academic markets. Its services are delivered via two websites that require two separate subscriptions: www.lexis.com is intended for legal research, while www.nexis.com is intended for corporations, local/state and federal government and academia (McKnight, 1997).
- (d) EBSCOhost – Online research database, is the world’s foremost premium research database service. EBSCO host serves thousands of libraries and other institutions. www.ebscohost.com
- (e) CompuLaw – A legal calendar software with court rules. CompuLaw rules databases are the most comprehensive, accurate and reliable rules available. CompuLaw’s databases are monitored more closely, updated more frequently and utilized more effectively than any other rules-based system on any platform.

Opening and closing hours of the law libraries: Most tertiary institution libraries in Nigeria stay open till 10pm. Barristers, however, often carry out their litigation in court between the hours of 9am and 3pm on the average (Ohuruogu and Umahi, 2013). In other words, practicing lawyers will be able to start visiting the libraries only after 4pm on working days. On weekends lawyers cannot have access to their libraries because Courts’ libraries do not open. Not many chambers’ libraries have their libraries open beyond 6p.m on weekdays as most offices close at 6pm. On weekends, the chambers are hardly open and where they are, they close early as the day’s work is

oftentimes seen as unofficial. This paper therefore opines that a three-hour library use would be sufficient during working days after 3p.m for a litigation lawyer if the lawyering standard must improve. On weekends, a much longer period should be expected. Consequently, chambers' libraries may consider opening on weekdays at 10a.m and closing at 8p.m, while on Saturdays they should remain open between 12 noon and 6pm.

Resource sharing: This paper makes a case for the formation of an association of Law Libraries with members having the advantage of professional intercourse to project the new services that law libraries can render to their users in this century. In this regard, the professional interaction(s) of Law librarians will be enhanced. Interlibrary loans should also be encouraged and made easier with information technology. As earlier argued in this paper, digitized law libraries can upload their library holdings to the internet, thereby making their libraries accessible to the whole world and making access to the holdings easier. Such digitized law libraries would also have the opportunity to view the content of other law libraries, thereby making interlibrary loans easier.

Conclusion:-

The concept of law library services to law users in this century has been examined. It is my view, in this paper, that the present structure of Nigeria law libraries would change, vis-à-vis a subsequent improvement in lawyering in this century, if there is an adoption of new and emerging technologies and a better appreciation of the library, librarians and their services. This, however, does not seek to erode the relevance of printed matter. I concede that good as digital technology is, librarians should not relegate printed matter to the background. I particularly note the argument of Vartan Gregorian (1996) that “no technology can yet match the convenience of a book's portability and easy proximity: no electronic medium can provide the intimacy of private communion or collaboration between the reader and the book.” Yet, it is my view that the future of the law library in Nigeria is in its ability and readiness to tailor its services to meet the challenges of new digital technology.

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