Law libraries in the face of changing technologies: the Nigerian experience

Olayinka Silas Akinwumi, CLN,PNM,CSC,CSP
Barrister-at-law/Senior Librarian,
Taslim elias law library, Nigerian law school, Abuja
Phone No: 07068617586
E-mail: olayinkasilas2000@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose: This paper set out to discuss (from a conceptual point of view) law libraries in the face of changing technologies: the Nigerian experience.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The approach adopted was secondary/library research.

Findings: The paper found out that most law libraries in Nigeria were lagging behind in the adoption of new technologies which has the potential to make them grow as law libraries of the 21st Century. This attitude has grossly hindered law libraries from effectively performing their primary function of disseminating legal information to users. It was also discovered that many law librarians have shown apathy to the use of the new technologies due to lack of the basic skills required in order to make them build a modern law library as could be properly so called in this age of information explosion.

Implication: The implication is law libraries cannot remain in the traditional or manual methodologies of operations and service delivery.

Originality/Value: The value of paper could be situated in the critical roles of law libraries in legal research, education and justice administration and how new technologies can help law libraries perform these roles more effectively and efficiently.

Keyword: Change**,** Information Technologies, Law, Law Librarians, Libraries, Nigeria.

Introduction

Generally, libraries play a significant role in national socio-economic development. Contemporary definition of library refers to its immense role in knowledge development. Libraries deal with physical objects, text-bearing objects, books, periodicals, a wide variety of materials, audio-visuals and more recently numerical databases software and technology. However, the essence of all these is to facilitate access to documents as agents of instruction, reference, research for educational institutions, professional organizations, industrial concerns and communities. However, these essential ingredients are also the main purposes of law libraries.

Law libraries have highly specialized materials to support the advancement of learning about law and for the practice of law. Law library is the principal directly to the training of future lawyers. This is where law library can be easily distinguished from other types of libraries as there could be no meaningful teaching, study or research in law complemented by the use of

technology in disseminating legal information without making adequate use of a law library.

Therefore, a good lawyer is one who knows where to look for the relevant law and thereafter apply it successfully.

There is no doubting the fact that law is essential in all aspects of human activity. It is a discipline that is constantly fed with practical problems and materials from the "real world" actual rather than hypothetical cases; proposals for legislative reform; and social problems from domestic violence and crime to world peace and environmental survival. What then are the specialized functions of law libraries?

Law libraries are essentially reference libraries. Although users especially lecturers and students can borrow materials when their research makes it necessary to borrow. For instance students are allowed to borrow only during their most trials accompanied with a note by any of the supervising lecturers:

To acquire, process, organize and disseminate legal information.

a. Law libraries, for instance, academic law libraries, serve as nerve centre particularly for law students, law lecturers not only for study, research but also to prepare notes and assignments.

b. Law libraries help users proof their knowledge of the rules and principles they have learned, which they must interpret and apply in the light of legal writings.

c. It is also in the law library students learn the fundamental techniques of the law and familiarize themselves with the drafting of so many legal instruments which include: contracts, proceedings, deeds of assignments, sale of land, incorporation, leases, among others.

Consequently, the law library affords students to get acquainted with latest decisions of courts on any legal issue(s). This is done easily through law reports, law journal which the law library has subscribed to either weekly, monthly or quarterly.

It is noteworthy to mention some of the substantial law libraries in Nigeria who are in themselves the products of legal information delivery in Nigeria:
- Supreme Court of Nigeria Law Library
- Appeal Court Law Library
- Taslim Elias Law Library, Nigerian Law School
- Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Law Library
- Universities' Faculties of Law Libraries
- Legal Aid Commission Law Library
- Human Rights' Commission Law Library
- High Courts Libraries
- Ministry of Justice Library
- National Judicial Institute Library
- National Industrial Court Library
- Law Reform Commission Library, among others.

However, the main goal of any law library (as mentioned above) is to acquire, process, store and disseminate legal information to its respective users.

Definition of Terms:

a.   What is a law library?

A law library is a library designed to assist law students, attorneys, judges and their law clerks and anyone else who finds it necessary to correctly determine the state of the law.

b.   What then is Information Technology?

Information Technology (IT), as defined by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA), is the study designed, development, implementation, support or management of computer – based information systems, software applications and computer hardware. It deals with the use of electronic computers and computer, convert, store, project, process, transmit and securely retrieve information.

It is also the branch of engineering that deals with the use of computers and telecommunications to retrieve and store and transmit information.

Some authors also see it as encompassing the methods and techniques used in information handling and retrieval by automatic means. The means include: computers, telecommunications and office systems or any combination of these elements.

Therefore, what one can conclude from the foregoing definitions is simply that information technology is a broad term used to refer to any form of technology used to create, transfer or store information in all its various forms (text, images, sound, multimedia files).

Resources in Law libraries

Law libraries are repositories of law books and legal information. They serve as a place of references and research not only for students but also for judges, lawyers, senior public officials and others having a need for legal information.

However, the following are the resources that should be available in any law library:

a.   Legal Books (local and foreign)

These refer to standard text-books on all areas of law both substantive and procedural for instance, field such as criminal law/procedure, civil law/procedure company law/public, constitutional, oil and Gas, family/law of successions, private/public international law, property law, arbitration, jurisprudence, equity and trusts, labour law, law of evidence, medical

law, Maritime law, intellectual property, among others.

b.   Law Reports: (both local and foreign)

These are reference materials; and they include:
- Nigeria Weekly Law Report
- Supreme Court Judgment
- Monthly Law Report
- All Nigeria Law Report
- Nigerian Supreme Court Cases
- Nigeria Law Report
- All Federation Weekly Law Report
- Criminal Law Report
- Laws of the Federation of Nigeria
- Ghana Law Reports
- Queen's Bench
- King's Bench
- All England Law Report

(c).   Journals: (local and foreign). These include:
- The Law Quarterly Review
- Criminal Law Review
- Modern Law Review
- American Journal of International Law
- Journal of African Law
- African Journal of International and Comparative Law
- Journal of Business Law
- Journal of Legal Studies
- International Journal of Legal Information
- The Cambridge Law Journal
- Nigerian Law and Practice
- Commonwealth Law Bulletin
- Business and Property Law
- African Journal of International and Comparative Law
- Journal of African Law, among others.

d.   State Laws:

These include:

Laws of Lagos State, FCT, Ogun, Ondo, Enugu, among others.

e.   Newsletters :

It includes:

a.   (a). Nigerian Law Times
b.   (b). Foreign Law Times

Library Automation

According to Agha (1986), Library Automation has been a subject of attention since the mid-1970s because of the spreading knowledge of the new technologies. However there have been challenges and constraints facing law library automation which include among others, erratic power supply, inadequate professional librarian to execute the project, absence of maintenance and support agreement, poor ICT structure, poor funding and poor ICT skills among library staff. Law libraries in Nigeria are therefore at cross roads in their attempt to automate their operations. For instance, one of the major issues has to do with choice of software to deploy. Software selection decision in law libraries and indeed in all libraries is based on report from other colleagues through conferences, workshops on what they feel and heard the software could offer.

Nonetheless, in spite of the challenges, automation (as a form of technology) brings, its benefits quite outweigh its disadvantages. Some of such advantages include:

a.   Easy access to law library materials
b.   Allows staff to better serve the patrons and; facilitate a multitude of tasks such as ac.
c.   Facilitate a multitude of tasks such as acquisitions, cataloging, circulation and reference
d.   Addresses the problem of manual processing of materials with short comings of filing and typing errors, retrieval errors, time consumption and drudgery.
e.   Easy generation of records
f.   Space conservation
g.   Improvement of information services
h.   Easy retrieval.

Be that as it may, with the rising level of technologies which have globalised the entire world, the dissemination of legal information has, therefore, become more expedient if the law library will continue to discharge its functions and remain relevant. With the introduce of new technologies, like computers services such as internet searches, on-line database searches, CD – ROM become what a modern law library should embrace as part of its functions.

As Tamuno and Ojedokun (1997) observed, it was argued that once a law library is computerized there are some intangible benefits that staff and students gain apart from being computer literates. These include:

➢ Revolutionary changes in information processing, storage, dissemination and distribution and became a key ingredient

in bringing – up great changes in over all aspects of society.

➤ Further the advert of law-cost computers and easy-to-use-word processing software, computer based image processing image processing techniques paved way for digitized information comprising textual to multimedia-date consisting of text, images along with digitized voice and video. Thus the information stored in law libraries has taken a major shift from volume – limiting paper to limitless multi-media digital form.

➤ The ease of information along with the internet has brought a paradigm shift in information usage from the need to know basis – information available when and where you need it. Therefore, digital publishing technologies and global networking have given rise to the development of a wide variety of digital libraries.

➤ The new or changing technologies have enhanced :
  i. Storage
  ii. Speed
  iii. Ease of use
  iv. Large volume of information
  v. Interoperability
  vi. Integration

Advantages of Web-based services in law libraries:
  i. Encapsulation
  ii. Availability
  iii. Self-description
  iv. Interoperability
  v. Simple

The following are some of the technologies available in law libraries:

(a). For Information capture:

Key-board, scanner, digital cameras, problems

(b). For storage:

PCs, floppy disks, CDS/DVDs, Pen drives, portable HDs, Blu Ray Dis

(c). For identification:

Barcode, Tarhle-tape, RFID, Biometric

(d). For legal Databases:

Compulaw, Legalpedia, Nexislexis, Justis, EBSCOHOST, ALICE Window, Easylaw, Westlaw (UK), Libsuite, Liberty, New Gen Lib, SOUL, Libsys, WIN/ISIS

(e). Library/Digital library software:

GreenStone digital library, Dspace, Fedora, X-lib$^+$, CDS-ISIS, Concourse, Library Manager, KOHA Version 3.0.1 (Integrated Library Management System).

The advantages of some of these web-based legal software databases to a law library include:

- On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) of the library holdings. OPAC is a web-based that does not require installation of any software on user's machine.

- Web-based circulation interface: can handle issues, returns and transfer. There is no need to install any special software on staff computers once there is intranet in place.

- Patrons' records management: It allows management of detailed information about each patron that registered in the library.

- On line renewals and reservation of item by users. This has reduced traffic at circulation desk/counter and freed some circulation staff for other duties.

- Branches relationship: Since the software is web-based it is easy to borrow a book in one branch and return it in another branch:

- Borrower history, comments and tags patrons can comment/review books, tag them and view their reading history and their records and make purchase suggestion.

- Customizable search: It allows a law library to choose the field they want on their search form for example, a search by author, title, subject and keywords. There is a** an advance search option.

- Full acquisitions: This includes orders from vendors, budgets and pricing information.

- Serial modules: It allows easy user cataloguing of legal journals and patron/user can view the On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC).

- Book bag and virtual shelves: Patrons can have a virtual library where they keep books specific to their needs.
- Multi Language OPAC support: Patrons are allowed to view OPAC in different language depending on the language chosen by the library.
- Security: This is to provide security measure to protect unauthorized person from accessing the system. For example, registered patrons or users are required to sign in with their user name and password to perform certain functions on the library database.
- Reports and statistics: management reports and statistics in cataloguing, acquisitions, serials and circulation are generated.

(f).   For Networking:

Client – server, P2P, Internet

Components of law libraries:

(a).   Wiki – This is a collaborative website whose content can be edited by anyone who has access to it. It is a web application that allows users to add content.

(b).   Blog

A blog (WEBLOG) is a website that contain dated entries in reverse chronological order (most recent first) about a particular topic. One person or groups of contributors can write them.

(c).   Podcast

A portmanteau of Apple's "I Pod" and "broadcasting" is a method of publishing files to the internet allowing users to subscribe to a feed and receive new fees automatically by subscription usually at no cost.

(d).   Social Networking

It uses software to build online social networks for communities of people who share interest and activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. It provides ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, e-mail, video, voice chat, file sharing, discussion groups and so on.

Role of Law Librarians in the changing technologies

John Makdisi (2003) has pointed out that "law librarians have the tools to guide law faculties and even deans towards new methods of education-delivery". He proposes that law librarians stay on the forefront by introducing new technology in the library and activity informing the faculty of the possibilities of using technology to enhance classroom education and facilitate communication with students. It is, essential therefore, that the tenure and promotions standards for law library directors include the need for a strong vision of the role of technology.

Thus the law librarians are adopting technologies like computing, networks, internet, digital data, among other, and getting adapted to the changing environment because their main focus is the "user" and the fulfillment of information needs of the users.

Law librarians no doubt have been information gate keepers as long as records have been gathered and preserved.

Traditionally, the role of law librarians used to:

- Select
- Search
- Collect
- Elicit and organize information in retrieval systems
- Maintain and preserve the resources.

However, the roles which remain for the law librarian in the face of changing technologies include the following:

- Designing software agents for patrons/clients/users;
- Designing, specialized software agents for the library setting;
- Cataloguing, distributing and customizing software agents
- Working co-operatively with software agents
- Contributing to information bases
- Indexing
- Conversion of print materials to machine-readable form
- Understand the technical aspect of the computer systems.

In the Digital Era, the role of the law librarian includes:

a. Negotiator – a person who should be able to identify the needs of patrons or users.

b. Navigator – Searching the ocean of information regardless the format

c. Facilitator – Information and infrastructure

d. Educator - being familiar with information in different formats and should be able to train the users whenever required

e. Entrepreneur – Marketing library services

f. Information filter – Able to provide right information, in right time to the right person from right resources.

Challenges of law libraries in the changing technology

Some of the challenges include:

-   Inadequate finance for the procurement of software and hardware and training of staff on the automation and digital project

-   Irregular power supply for the automation, internet digital, to be a success.

-   Lack of adequate infrastructure in terms of computer hardware to be in place i.e. having work stations for all the various routine activities.

-   Non-dedication of some members of staff to be responsive to the changing technologies in their respective libraries.

-   Most library staff are not computer literate thereby making it difficult for most law libraries to embrace the new technologies for easy information storage and dissemination.

-   Only few law libraries embraced the new paradigm of the "*just in case*"-law library. Therefore, what has been done in most law libraries was mere automation; and reflecting on the new technologies and adapting to the new situation has never taken place. The consequence of this was that "other players in the information business are starting to take over our roles and the ground to be retained is continually increasing".

Little wonder, therefore, why also some disciplines have taken over the roles of the law library and information infrastructure on their own; for instance, physics.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is no doubt that law libraries have tremendously improved in meeting the legal information needs of its users. This is as and it has enhanced the operation and services of the library result of the opportunities provided by changing technologies such as computing automation, networks, internet, digital data, among others but law libraries and law librarians still need much to be done if they want to continue to remain relevant in the global world. We are not saying that the traditional method employed by law librarians in discharging their professional duties is no longer relevant or has become moribund in view of the changing technologies. This is because the work must first be done on paper before in-put into the computer. For instance, cataloguing and classification of library materials cannot be done effectively without first using manual method. The same goes to indexing and abstracting of our legal materials. But the point we are making here is that technology aids easier and speedy retrieval and dissemination of information to users.

Therefore, for Nigerian law libraries (especially the ones in academic environment) to move away from solely traditional to modern ways of providing services to their users, it is recommended that:

1. There is the need for regular power supply which should be settled with management before embarking on any of the technologies – automation, internet digital, computing. Erratic power supply will affect the smooth running of library services in an automated environment.

2. There should be increase in user education. For instance, librarians and other library staff should be computer literate prior to introduction of any form of information technologies. This will enable them to know how to find, use, evaluate and discriminate between resources. Besides, links to library resources and services should be an integral part of law.

3. In terms of provision of technological tools, the law libraries should have sufficient and reliable equipment and infrastructure for internet access, for easy retrieval and dissemination of legal

information other technological tools the law libraries should address are to ensure:

    a. Up-to-date, reliable, user friendly databases for retrieval of domestic, regional and international legal materials;

    b. Multi-jurisdictional sites to facilitate research on-line globally.

    c. Bigger, better, customized search engines that can comprehend research interests from the user's profile, personalization and search history.

    d. Less (library – owned) computers, and more wireless connections.

4. There must also be survival of the physical law library by reinventing our surroundings. How could this be achieved?

    a. By ensuring that large amounts of space correctly devoted to book stacks and computer labs are replaced by work spaces and discussion rooms with wireless connections.

    b. By ensuring that learning resource centres, staffed in co-operation between library, technology and law specialists;

    c. By creating a café adjacent or on the premises to balance the desire for access to the new technologies with the desire to come together, interact, eat and drink.

5. In terms of the role of the law librarian, he must ensure that:

    a. There is continued performance as collection builders, of bother print and electronic resources;

    b. The law librarian should increasingly be proactive in furthering the provision of access to resources in the web;

    c. More time be devoted to value added services such as research guides and web gateways.

    d. The law librarian should serve as interpreter and guide to resources, available physically and virtually;

    e. The law librarian should also increase his continued performance as collection builders, of both print and electronic resources.

6. The Management of our respective law libraries should continually embark on staff development. This could be done in the following ways:

    a. Recruit and train staff to maintain a high level of competency in:

        i. Domestic, foreign and international legal systems, including cultural context.

        ii. Traditional library skills such as collection development and retrieval methods

        iii. Pedagogical methods, that is, developing abilities as to know which kinds of questions to ask and where to look for information

        iv. Technical tools

    b. Fund and encourage staff to attend courses such as those arranged annually by Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL), International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) and International Federation of Libraries Association (IFLA).

    c. Offer extended sabbaticals to allow 6-12 months for research or working on a particular library project, such as developing a comprehensive legal research guide.

7. Management of our respective law libraries should also ensure that their law libraries are networked on a national, regional and international level. This will remain one of our most important channels for orientation and

co-operation. Through our networks the law library will do the following:

a. Maintain reciprocal arrangements for inter-library loans and use electronic delivery where necessary.

b. Take part in on-going efforts in to our *** establish alternative, open access channels for the delivery of academic and legal publications through virtual library.

c. Engage in the political battle for public right to access to and use of legal information.

d. Offer exchange possibilities such as fellowship grants

e. Develop and support initiatives such as:

  i. GLIN (Global Legal Information Network)

  ii. ITN (Legal Information Transfer Network)

  iii. WorldLII (World Legal Information Institute)

  iv. SOSIG (Social Science Information Gateway)

Law libraries are not just to change for the sake of changing. They have to adapt to the user habits which have changed as a result of "changing technological possibilities". However, changing technologies has given law libraries in Nigeria not only challenges, but also opportunities. We must grasp these opportunities to broaden our scope and provide our users with the best possible service. Although these may seem difficult to achieve at the moment but we shall get there some day; so that law libraries in Nigeria can compete favourably with their counterparts globally. The only solution, therefore, is that since we have known the development we should react appropriately in time.

References:

Adeyomoye, J.I. (2008): Library Automation Projects in Nigeria Private Universities: The Case of Igbinedion University, Okada. *Information Technologist*, 5(2). 19 – 23.

Agha, S.J. (1986): Library Automation in Nigeria: Achievements and Constraints on Progress Program: *Electronic Library and Information Systems*, 20 (4) 409 retrieved, December 10, 2010, from: http://www.Emeraldinsight.com/10. 1108/EB046951.

Alabi, G.A.(1986): Library Automation in Nigerian University Libraries. *Information Development..* 2 (1). 163-165

Ani O.E. et al (2005) : Adoption of Information and Communication Technology ICT) in Academic Libraries: A Strategy for Library Networking in Nigeria. *The Electronic Library*, 23 (26) 702-709.

Darkey E. Mensah (2008: Improving Services in Law Libraries: The Case of the Faculty of Law Library, University of Ghana, Legon, *International Journal of Legal Information..* 36 (1), 80 – 81, 84.

David J. Gerber (2001): Globalization and Legal Knowledge: Implications for Comparative Law. 75 *Tulane Law Review* 949, 956.

Haughen Betty (2005): The Impact of Globalization on Law Libraries. *International Journal of Legal Information..* 33(3), winter 474, 476 – 478

Hobohm Hans-Christoph (1996): The Impact of New Technology On Libraries: An Introductory Note. Being a paper delivered paper at the Open Session of the Social Science Libraries at the 62nd IFLA General Conference in Beijing, 27 August.

John Makdisi (2003): Improving Education Delivery in the Twenty – First Century: The Vital Role of the Law Librarian *Law Library Journal* 95. 431- 432.

Molholt, Pat (1987): A View from the Chip: The Influence of Information Technologies on Libraries and Librarianship. *IFLA Journal*, 13. 23-25.

Prue Presser (2000): Training the Trainers from Developing Countries: Issues for the Library. *International Journal of Legal Information,* 28 350.

Roger J. Goebel (1989): Professional Qualification and Educational Requirements for Law Practice in a Foreign Century: Bridging the Cultural Gap. 63 Tulane Law Review 443, 448.

Sani A. and Tiamiyu M.(2005) : Evaluation of Automated Services in Nigerian Universities". The Electronic Library, 23 (3) 276-279. Retrieved, May 30, 2009 fromhttp://www.emeraldin sight.com/10/108/eb 046951

Tamuno O.G. and Ojedokun A.A.(1997): Learning from the Experiences of Organizations which have implemented Information Technology

System in their Libraries: University of Ibadan in Perspective: Paper delivered at a Workshop Organized by the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) Lagos Chapter held at University of Lagos.

http://www.glin.gov/ accessed on March 13, 2011

http://www.law,nyu.edu/library/itn accessed on March 13, 2011

http://www.sosig.ac.uk/law accessed on March 14, 2011

http://www.worldlii.org accessed on March 11, 2011.