Chapter 15
The Role of Digital Libraries in Supporting Open Distance E–Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to discuss the potential of digital libraries offer unparalleled resources for supporting Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL). This chapter addresses and discusses features relating to what is meant by ODeL and how can it be supported by the library setting, the functionality of the digital library; and how ODeL resources are organised in the digital library. The chapter explores the advantages of digital libraries for ODeL and the types of learning that can be supported by digital libraries. There is an interest in the usage of electronic resources for teaching, learning, and research. The chapter provides a valuable insight into the role and influence of digital libraries and e-resources on ODeL.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are providers of multifaceted information resources that cut across print and electronic formats (Pavani,2016). The evolution in Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL), in which education and training are delivered online via the internet, has posed challenges as well as opportunities for libraries and information centers. Open distance e-learners and traditional learners now have access to a universe of digital information and tools through the information superhighway. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), as well as models for novel means of delivering educational instruction require librarians to re-assess the way they develop, manage, and deliver resources and services in an increasingly technologically changing environment.

Globally, libraries are characterised by a hybrid of traditional and digital make up. They serve different purposes and user groups depending on the type of library. ODeL is a novel area that has proved that academic libraries can also support. Libraries have adapted computer based learning and they are now

connected in the unity of libraries and ODeL(Eke, 2010). Libraries support ODeL by offering a variety of multimedia information resources and ICT supported services to facilitate access to their holdings which include teaching and learning material (Hermosa and Anday, 2008). These services include but not limited to: online bibliographic instructions, computerized library catalogs, digital libraries, distance learning services, electronic databases, instant messaging services, interlibrary loan, and document services, ready references, virtual classrooms and virtual references. In the era of universal learning in which learners of all ages utilise electronic devices on a regular basis to access learning material on the intranet as well as on the internet, libraries are expected to make an effort to familiarize and prepare content in their digital collections and their online library services supported by the fast changing and emerging information and communication technologies. Eke (2010) confirmed the presence of such a trend in which learners have closely incorporated technologies to improve their learning, and they evolved into the key supporters and providers of multifaceted services that enhance wider access to information.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to investigate the role and perspective of the use of digital libraries in supporting the ODeL environment. The objectives were to:

- examine how digital libraries are responding to the challenges of delivering core services to ODeL learners;
- examine library practices and technologies being applied in the construction of digital libraries;
- determine challenges and opportunities which digital libraries bring to the support of ODeL learners; and
- recommend strategies to enhance the provision of support for a collaborative learning environment.

DIGITAL LIBRARY

The field of digital libraries is a growing area as scholars continue to grapple with defining the constituencies or features of such institutions. One may assert on a comparatively narrow definition, based clearly on the properties of the traditional print library, or reflect a much broader continuum of possibilities. The most comprehensive opinion takes a digital library to be, as its starting point, essentially what the internet is these days.

Saracevic (2000) defined the digital library as an "electronic information access system that offers the user an intelligible view of an organised, designated, and managed body of information". On the other hand, Brahaj, Razum, and Hoxha (2013) defined digital libraries as organisations that provide the resources, including the specialised staff to select, maintain, distribute and preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by the defined community or set of communities.

Based on these definitions, a digital library is not equal to a digitised collection with information management tools but rather it is also a series of events that bring together collections, services, and people in support of the full life cycle of creation, dissemination, use, and preservation of data, information, and knowledge (Sharifabadi,2006).

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