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Educators' Perspective on Library Education in Nigeria

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Introduction

Library education in Nigeria is very much tied up with the general social and political history of the country. As such, those who aspired to become librarians went to Britain to qualify for the Associate of the Library Association (ALA). However, with the attainment of independence in 1960, the country witnessed the establishment of tertiary institutions at various levels. The first library school was established at University College Ibadan in 1960.

Prior to this period, the Carnegie Corporation has sponsored two studies (Margaret Wrong in 1939 and Ethel Fagan in 1940) to survey the library needs of West Africa with the view to formalizing its training program. Wrong recommended for a Library Training Institute to be established in Nigeria while Fagan recommended instead the establishment of a Regional Library Institute to cater for the whole of British West Africa. Consequently, the British Council, Carnegie Corporation and the Governments of Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria and Sierra Leone jointly financed the Achimota library school in Ghana, which was opened in 1944. The main objective of the school was to "improve the technical competence of library assistants and to prepare them for the first part of the British Library Association Registration Examination" (Agluolu and Mohammed 1987).

The stage for the development of library profession in Nigeria was set up with the arrival of John Harris as the librarian of the University College Ibadan, in 1948. "He was not only instrumental to the development of the University College Library, but also organized the Native Authority Libraries, the first organized Library Training course in 1950." (Dean 1966). Similarly in 1952, Joan Allen organized a course for reading room attendants under the Northern Regional Library Service while the Eastern Regional Library Board, which was created in 1935, introduced a training course for library assistants in 1956. The UNESCO seminar on Public Library Development in Africa held in 1953 at Ibadan was another turning point in the history of librarianship in the country. Agluolu and Mohammed (1987) observed that "it laid the foundation of modern libraries in Nigeria and help crystallize the concept of the library profession and librarianship itself."

Based on (Lancour 1958 and Sharr 1963) reports on library needs of West Africa and Northern Nigeria respectively, two library schools were established in Nigeria. The first was the Institute of Librarianship which was opened in 1960 at the University College Ibadan and the second was at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, in 1968. These institutions were built on different philosophical and professional orientations. While the Ibadan library school began with one year basic professional program leading to the award of the post-graduate diploma in accordance with the main objective of the Institute which has been "to educate the leadership for the library profession", the Zaria library school mounted an undergraduate program leading to the award of the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree based on the objective "to train professional librarians at all levels with well rounded education up to international standard while placing emphasis on the problems facing libraries in Africa."

It apparently became clear in the mid 1970s that the two existing library schools despite their parallel philosophical orientation, cannot meet the nation's library needs. Thus, in 1977 and 1978 two additional library schools were established at Bayero University Kano and University of Maiduguri respectively. Presently, there are over fifty institutions including Universities (Federal, States and Private) Polytechnics and Colleges across the country that offer Library and Information Science programs at Certificate; Ordinary, National and Higher Diploma; Degree and Higher Degree levels. The proliferation of library programs in different types of institutions can be seen as a good development for the profession, on the other hand however, it has given rise to divergent opinions on the education of librarians especially from the perspectives of curriculum, resources, and faculty.

Content of educational programs have been in most professional fields a conflicting area either from the point of view of the practitioner or as a result of certain educational philosophy. While accepting these differences it is imperative to point out that there are some curricula elements which because of certain purposes and functions common to all libraries, can be said to be necessary components of the curriculum of all library schools. Danton (1949) and Aguolu (1985) identified the indispensable 'core' curriculum which must be embraced by any library school: cataloging and classification, reference and bibliography, collection development and library administration and organization.

The curriculum as well as the goals and objectives of a particular library school must in large measure be dependant upon the nature and needs of the libraries it is to serve. This accounted for the differences in curriculum as well as stated aims and objectives of library schools. Despite this variation, Ochogwu (1990) analyzed the content of brochures of several library schools and reported that the goals and objectives of library education irrespective of the environment and level can be summarized into four main perspectives. These are:

1. The production of graduates mature enough to face the modern challenges of information delivery services;
2. The production of graduates who will constitute middle level and high level manpower needed to carry out management of different types of libraries;
3. The production of graduates with adequate theoretical knowledge to teach in one or more areas in the field of Library, Archives and Information Science, and
4. The production of individuals who will be mature enough to identify and conduct research into any problem area of the information profession.

The importance of information resources in the education of any discipline cannot be over-emphasized. At this stage of the profession's development in Nigeria the need to focus attention on the adequacy of information resources produced locally rather than foreign is imminent. At the moment Dipeolu (1975) stated that "it is hardly an exaggeration to observe that more than ninety percent of books purchased by African university libraries emanate from Europe and America. The

remaining 10% or less is published in different parts of Africa." This is a dangerous trend in library education in the country. Thus while the issue of relevance and appropriateness is emphasized, it might be difficult to embrace them entirely since majority of such resources are published outside the country. According to Bozimo (1985) "our commitment to the proper training of future generations of library professionals require that we as educators find and create the literature that will serve as effective learning tools, the literature in other words ,that is relevant to our educational purposes."

No matter how good the objectives, the curriculum and the physical facilities of an educational institution may be its fundamental excellence will depend primarily upon quality of the faculty. In any enterprise the question of personnel is one of major importance, so also in an academic institution. The faculty is of paramount concern because in every sense the faculty is the institution. Wheeler (1946) stressed further that "no master curriculum, no remarkable philosophy, no balancing of principles Vs methods, no appealing outlines and ingenious devices can possibly mean as much to education for librarianship as the quality of the faculty."

Statement of the Problem

Professional library education in Nigeria has come a long way since the reports of various surveys from Wrong (1939) to Pearce (1968) as evidenced by the proliferation of library schools and programs in all kinds of institutions in the country. This has however given rise to conflict of objectives between the educator and the practitioner on the issue of curriculum and its relevance to practice. The educator is likely to want to emphasize the theories and principles that underlie professional practice while the practitioner is more interested in emphasis on practical skills. This diverse emphasis on objectives has been identified by Ochogwu (1988) as a major crisis in education for librarianship in Nigeria because it has made it difficult to differentiate between education and training for library and information work. This study is therefore an attempt to explain library Education from the perspective of the educators.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the content of the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) curriculum of Nigerian library schools?
2. Is the curriculum content adequate to produce professional librarians?
3. Are there adequate resources in the library schools to be able to impart knowledge based on the curriculum?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To highlight the nature of the curriculum content of BLS programs of Nigerian library schools
2. To examine the adequacy of the curriculum towards producing professional librarians
3. To highlight the available Resources in Nigerian library schools

Methodology

Survey method was employed. The population for the study was made up of the twenty universities in Nigeria offering the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) program. However, only five universities were selected for the study: - University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Bayero University Kano, University of Maiduguri and Abia State University. The five were selected because they constitute the first set of universities to offer the BLS program and still maintained it. The study was also limited to the BLS program because it is the minimum entry requirement into the library Profession as stipulated by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Questionnaire was administered on five randomly selected Faculty Staff in each of the five universities in the study, making a total of Twenty-five. Of this number, Twenty-three (92%) were properly filled and returned. Table 1 below shows the distribution of respondents according to rank. Thirty-five percent of the respondents are Assistants Lecturers, twenty-six percent Graduate Assistants and Senior Lecturers respectively, nine percent Professors and four percent Tutors. Among them fifty-two percent has been teaching for between 1-5 years, eighteen percent for 6-10 years while thirty percent have taught for 10 years and above.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by Rank

RANK	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Professor	02	9
Lecturer	06	26
Assistant Lecturer	08	35
Graduate Assistant	06	26
Tutor	01	4
TOTAL	23	100

On the curriculum content of Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) programs in library schools in Nigeria, the researcher proposed six courses identified by various scholars as 'core', and asked the respondents to select in order of preference which should form the curriculum. The result showed that Cataloging and Classification was given maximum preference (100%), followed by Collection Development with 87%, and library automation coming third with 78%. The least preferred course to be part of the 'core' curriculum was Reference and Bibliography (9%). Detail is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Core Courses

COURSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
	N=23	100%
Cataloguing and Classification	23	100

Collection Development	20	87
Library Automation	18	78
Information Science	10	43
Field Experience	10	43
Reference and Bibliography	09	39

Asked to state whether the available qualified Staff and teaching Facilities are adequate to impart appropriate knowledge of librarianship, only eighteen percent (18%) stated is adequate while the majority, eighty-two percent (82%) observed it is inadequate. The above response is not much different from that of teaching facilities where again the majority of respondents eighty-seven percent (87%) reported that information resources and facilities such as Books, Journals, Databases, Computers, Internet etc. are inadequate to impart the necessary and required knowledge of modern librarianship.

Table 3 Adequacy of Resources

RESPONSE	ACADEMIC STAFF		RESOURCES / FACILITIES	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Adequate	04	18	03	13
Inadequate	19	82	20	87
TOTAL	23	100	23	100

Discussion of Findings

1. The curriculum content of library schools in Nigeria is varied. However, certain courses such as cataloguing and classification, collection development, reference, and bibliography are found to be common to all library schools. The variation could be attributed to the difference in the traditions and customs of the people, their needs as well as the general philosophical foundations upon which the library schools were set up. Amaechi (1985) supported the distinctions when he said "Bearing in mind the different traditions and circumstances of our universities, it would not only be unrealistic but patently presumptuous, for any one person to attempt to draw a standard undergraduate curriculum in Library Science for all Nigerian Library Schools."

2. Despite the variation in the content of the curriculum of library schools in Nigeria, it is found to be adequate to impart the appropriate knowledge of librarianship. Most respondents however, called for the review of the curricular with a view to emphasizing more on current Information Technology courses such as Communication Systems, Database Management, System Analysis, Information Science etc. Defending the introduction of these new courses into the field of library Science, Ochogwu (1990) sees it "as a necessary response to the needs for multi-disciplinary course work."

3. All the library schools in Nigeria lack adequate qualified Faculty Staff. The bulk

of the Faculty Staff are in the lower academic cadre of Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer Two, and Lecturer One. Senior members of Faculty such as Professors, Readers and Senior Lecturers capable of teaching and supervising post graduate students at Masters and PhD levels are few. Reasons such as brain drain, librarianship being a new field, few library schools etc. have been identified as the main cause. The situation is so alarming that Ajibero (1990) cautioned "at present the required trained lecturers are not available in our library schools. The situation has developed into a crisis and may if positive actions are not taken threaten the very existence of some schools and programs."

4. Information Resources and Facilities such as Textbooks, Journals, On-line databases, Computers, Internet etc., are grossly inadequate in many library schools and completely absent in some. The importance of Information Resources and Facilities in the education of any profession cannot be over-emphasized; however continuous dependence on foreign countries such as Europe and America for these resources is a major hindrance towards developing local information resources and imparting the relevant and appropriate education for librarianship in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following are suggested

1. The Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) need to coordinate and harmonize their activities towards developing acceptable and standard curriculum as well as periodically monitor and accredit all library schools' programs in the country.

2. Librarianship is a multi-disciplinary field and said to be the most affected and dynamic area in recent years as a result of the rapid development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Consequently library schools where ever they are cannot afford to trail behind in changing, modifying and updating their curricular to reflect current trends in the Information Industry. It is good to know that some library schools have introduced new courses and also changed their names from Department of Library Science to Library and Information Science which has also changed the title of the degrees from BLS to BLIS.

3. An articulate staff recruitment and development policy for library schools is desirable. The deplorable staffing situation cuts across all the Universities in Nigeria. Study fellowship for higher degrees and research grants has become a privilege, the common complain is lack of funds. It is interesting however to note the intervention of the Education Trust Fund (ETF) in the training of academic staff of Institutions of higher learning in the country. Beginning 2008/2009 academic session, the ETF has earmarked the sum of ₦40m (Naira) each, to be spent annually by tertiary institutions on staff training both within and outside the country and the sum of ₦10m (Naira) is set aside as research grant for study fellows. Should this intervention program continue for the next ten to twenty years, universities in Nigeria will witness a remarkable change in their staffing situations.

4. Increased funding for library schools to acquire current textbooks, subscribe to new and current journal titles, as well as purchase computers and Internet facilities is necessary in order for library schools in Nigeria to continue imparting the relevant knowledge and skills required for library and information work and to keep abreast of developments in the field world wide.

Conclusion

Library education in Nigeria was characterized by one problem or the other, since the establishment of the first two library schools on different professional and

philosophical foundations. This gave rise to the proliferation of many library science programs in various kinds of Institutions resulting in varying professional Qualifications, differences in curriculum content with divergent aims and objectives. The inability of the profession to monitor and harmonize these differences at that time indicated the weakness of the foundation upon which the education of librarians in Nigeria is based. It is hoped that with the current intervention of bodies such as LRCN, NLA, NUC and ETF on the issue of curriculum harmonization, provision of resources and facilities; and staff training and development, positive changes will be witnessed and library schools in Nigeria will be the pride of librarians in the country

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