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# Employers' Expectations of Library Education in Nigeria

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## Introduction

Library Education in Nigeria was 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 educational institutions at various levels. The first Library school was established at University College Ibadan in 1960.

Prior to 1960, 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." (Aguolu 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 in 1950, the first organized Library Training course" (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 created in 1935, introduced a training course for Library Assistants in 1956. Another turning point in the history of Librarianship in the Country was the UNESCO seminar on Public Library Development in Africa held at Ibadan in 1953. Aguolu 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 at the University College Ibadan in 1960, and the second was at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria

in 1968. These institutions were built on different philosophical and professional orientations. The Ibadan Library School began with one year basic professional program leading to the award of the post-graduate diploma with the main objective of “educating the leadership for the library profession”, while the Zaria Library School started with under-graduate program leading to the award of the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree based on the objective of “training 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 issues of relevance of curriculum to professional practice; quality of Library School’s graduates; and their competence in the field.

On the issue of curricular of Library Schools, Conant (1990) lamented that “employers’ lack confidence in the functions of library schools as gate keepers to the profession”. In order to restore this confidence according to him “library schools must revise their curriculum to correspond appropriately to the knowledge and skills required of the professional librarian.” One major weakness of library schools curricular identified by Danton (1946) is “the inability of library schools curricular to be integrated with any theoretical discipline such as Sociology, Education, Political science etc. on which practical disciplines are based or on the philosophy of the subject to serve as its foundation”.

Library Education was of sufficient international concern to merit the Standing Committee of IFLA (1976) Section for Library Schools, to decide to undertake the task of formulating International Standards for library education. This move pre-supposed the existence of differences in library education worldwide. IFLA still recognizes the uniqueness of each country, hence each country should decide for itself what kind of librarians and information specialists it needs and what kind of training such persons ought to have. Agada (1985) puts it clearly when he said “while theories and principles may be universal, however practice cannot and need not be. Relevance dictates that practice be adapted to local needs and circumstances.”

The quality of products from library schools is another contentious issue between employers and educators. Employers are interested in the production of practical persons who can fit into the library environment immediately after graduation. Banjo (1984) for example, specifically analyzed the qualities required of a Special librarian thus “must be a man who is able to sense, identify, and interpret information in a special area for the use of the specialist in that area. He must therefore be versatile, adaptable and highly imaginative. Here in lies the challenge to those providing education for special librarianship.”

Reaction from the field of practice based on the accounts and reports of library administrators and employers has indicated consistent short comings on the part of the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) graduates. Ita (1986) stated that “products of the undergraduate programs are in general rather weak and less imaginative. For a long time a certain air of vagueness seems to hang on them so that they approach their professional duties with little confidence.” Affia (1986) another seasoned library administrator observed that graduates from the BLS programs have a feeling of insecurity in certain job opportunities. To sum up employers’ expectations of library education, Cronin (1982) has this to say “professional qualification and experience do not automatically guarantee acceptability in the eyes of employing organizations. Employers want individuals who have certain

positive characteristics. Basically, these can be defined as good communication and organizational skills, the ability to work in a small team, and the ability to work with minimum supervision."

## Statement of the Problem

Library literature has clearly indicated that employers of library schools' graduates are dissatisfied with their products. While library schools curricular emphasized theories and principles that underlie professional practice, employers are more interested in practical skills. As a consequence of this ideologically opposed needs, Conant (1990) observed that "there is a gap in the practical competence of many library schools' graduates that is felt both by graduates and employers. That gap leaves employers dissatisfied with the programs of the library schools."

The annual National Conference on Education for Librarianship which started in 1984 to re-examine the curricular of library schools with the aim of making them more relevant to national needs, is another major indicator of the problem of library education in Nigeria. Such a move according to Ochai (1987) is tantamount to an admission that our library educators have all along been imparting knowledge that could be described as irrelevant." Thus the purpose of this study is to highlight the expectations of employers in the education of librarians in Nigeria.

## Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions

1. Is the Curriculum Content of Library Schools in Nigeria relevant to professional practice?

2. Are graduates of Library Schools in Nigeria competent in the field?

3. What are the qualities required by Employers of graduates of Library Schools in Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To examine the relevance of Library Education to professional practice in Nigeria

2. To examine the competence of Nigerian Library Schools graduates in the field

3. Identify the qualities required by Employers when recruiting Library and Information Science workers.

Methodology

Survey method was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of 44

Libraries made up of 25 University Libraries and 19 Public Libraries in the Northern Region of Nigeria. However a sample of 5 University Libraries and 5 Public Libraries was drawn from the following five states: - BAUCHI, BORNO, KADUNA, KANO and PLATEAU. University and Public libraries were chosen for the study because between them, they employ about 75% of library schools' graduates, while the States were sampled either because they represent a geo-political zone or because of the existence of a library school. Questionnaire was the only instrument used to elicit information from the University Librarians and the Directors of Public Libraries in the States sampled.

Data presentation and analysis

The questionnaire was administered on each of the ten respondents and a hundred (100%) percent response rate was recorded. Table 1 shows some basic background information about the Libraries. It shows that out of the ten Libraries, three were established in the 60s, four in the 70s and two in the 80s , while only one (Kaduna Public Library) was established in 1952. Four of the Libraries have between 15 and 20 professional staff each and the remaining six has between 30 and 35 professional staff each. Four of the libraries have at least 10 service departments each, while the remaining six has less than 10 each.

Table 1: Background Information of the Libraries Surveyed

| LIBRARY | YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT | DEPARTMENTS | PROF. STAFF |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tafawa Balewa University Library | 1981 | 7 | 20 |
| Bauchi Public Library | 1989 | 6 | 23 |
| Ramat Library University of Maiduguri | 1975 | 10 | 35 |
| Maiduguri Public Library | 1978 | 6 | 20 |
| Kashim Ibrahim Library (ABU Zaria) | 1962 | 12 | 35 |
| Kaduna Public Library | 1952 | 7 | 30 |
| Bayero University Kano Library | 1964 | 12 | 35 |
| Kano Public Library | 1968 | 10 | 33 |
| University of Jos Library | 1972 | 6 | 36 |
| Jos Public Library | 1976 | 6 | 15 |

Competence was another important aspect of practice which the study addressed. Hence, the questionnaire sought to know whether the products of Nigerian Library Schools are competent in the field or not. The responses indicated that forty percent of the respondents were satisfied with the level of competence exhibited by the young graduates in discharging the professional jobs assigned to them. Another forty percent were not sure while the remaining twenty percent were dissatisfied with the performance of the graduates of the Library Schools in Nigeria. Table 2 provides a vivid picture of the responses on competence.

Table 2: Competence in the field

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|
| Competent | 04 | 40 |
| Non-competent | 04 | 40 |
| Undecided | 02 | 02 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 |

Table 3: Qualities required for recruiting librarians

| QUALITIES* | V. IMPT | IMPT | F. IMPT. | NOT. IMPT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic qualification | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Professional qualification | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Working experience | 4 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Communication skills | 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Research experience | 2 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Information systems | 1 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| Computing skills | 0 | 4 | 4 | 2 |

*Arranged in preferential order

Responding to the qualities they are looking for when recruiting librarians and information staff, the Employers agreed that academic and professional qualifications are the most important. Working experience, communication skills and research experience follow in that order. For further details, the tabulated responses are presented in table 3 above.

On the issue of relevance of curricular of library schools to professional practice in Nigeria, sixty percent of the respondents affirmed positively that the knowledge imparted on career librarians based on the curricular of library schools is relevant. However, the remaining forty percent disagreed stating that the education for librarianship based on the present curricular of library schools in Nigeria is not appropriate to contemporary library practice. The responses are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Relevance of theory to practice

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|
| Relevant | 06 | 60 |
| Not-relevant | 04 | 40 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 |

Discussion of findings

1. The study found out that library education based on the present curricular of library schools in Nigeria is relevant to professional practice. This is very significant considering the vast amount of speculation in the literature on the obsoleteness of library schools' curricular in Nigeria. The possible explanation for

this could be that libraries in Nigeria are yet to transform into Information Delivery Mechanisms in an effective Information System which requires not only the knowledge of Information and Communication Technology, but also in-depth knowledge of Systems development, management, analysis and evaluation.

2. Fresh graduates lack confidence and initiative resulting in incompetence when assigned professional responsibilities. This is not surprising because this are attributes which are neither acquired in the school nor immediately on the field but come with experience and on the job training. Library schools should not be expected to merely train individuals on the routine of library works- although important, but “shall we require graduation from college as a pre-requisite to their requirement? Shall we give a graduate degree for work which includes this sort of learning? Shall it be required of all prospective librarians? Shall it finally be a part of a truly professional curriculum of education for librarianship? The answer to all is probably no.” (Danton 1946).

3. Academic and professional qualifications are the preferred criteria for employing librarians in Nigeria. This is in tandem with the minimum entry requirements (Bachelor of Library Science) into the profession as set by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and the Nigeria Library Association (NLA). The LRCN in conjunction with the NLA has currently resume the registration of professionally qualified librarians in the country with a view to knowing their exact number as well as monitor and safeguard the profession against the influx of quacks.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following

1. Despite the relevance of the current curricular to practice, libraries and library schools need to embrace current developments in the field. While it is expedient for the Libraries to transform into effective and efficient Information Delivery Mechanisms (IDM) equipped with modern and up to-date ICTs to be able to compete favorably with other IDMs, the library schools must lead by revising their curriculum to incorporate new disciplines and fields of study in-line with such transformations.

2. Employers must provide induction training to fresh graduates and avail them with opportunities for on the job training in-order to develop their confidence, to have initiatives thereby boost their competence in the discharge of their professional duties.

3. Computing skills and knowledge of current Information Systems and Information Delivery Mechanisms should form one of the major requirements for recruiting librarians and information specialist in Nigeria.

4. Increase funding and attention is required in the information industry. Government at various levels is required to provide adequate funds and create the enabling environment for the information industry to flourish. It is only when Infrastructure and facilities such as effective and efficient telecommunications, structures, computers, internet facilities and a literate population is put in place that the Private sector will be lured to invest in the industry and make it a viable one.

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 and Questionable Products. This led Employers to become dissatisfied with the graduates of library schools due to their incompetence and lack of initiative in the field. However despite the varied

curriculum of library schools, the study found out that library education is relevant to professional practice in Nigeria. It is recommended that library schools need to harmonize and revise their curricular to reflect current trends in the Information profession, while Government on its part is called upon to put in place the necessary infrastructure and provide the enabling environment for Private sector participation for a viable and efficient Information Industry to emerge.

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