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7-31-2012

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Bamgbose, Oludayo John, "Student-Based Societies and the Development of Library and Information Profession in Nigeria: Any Nexus? A Case Study of LARISSA, University of Ibadan" (2012). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. Paper 781.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/781

Library Philosophy and Practice
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/
ISSN 1522-0222

Student-Based Societies and the Development of Library and Information Profession in Nigeria: Any Nexus? A Case Study of LARISSA, University of Ibadan

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Abstract
The roles of Library Schools in the contemporary world transcend being ivory towers where Library and Information Professionals are trained. Besides, Library schools provide platform for students to develop their leadership potentials and abilities through participation in student-centred programmes. This paper chronicles the activities of one of such societies – the Library, Archival and Information Studies Students' Association (LARISSA) in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria from the perspective of its activities in relation to the development of Library and Information Practice (LIP) in Nigeria. The study shows that a number of the LARISSA activities have direct positive impact on LIP particularly, in the areas of training and provision of teaching and training resources to the library school. There are however certain obstacles confronting the activities of the society. While the revenue base of LARISSA could be strengthened, it is recommended also that the society becomes consistent in its programme. There is also a need to network with other library schools, thereby sharing strengths amongst these schools.

Introduction

One of the basic characteristics of a profession is its compulsory length of training, which eventually qualifies an individual upon its completion to be called a professional among other qualifying factors. During the length of training, a learner systematically acquires the fundamental ideals, ethics and rudiments of such profession. Emphasis is often placed on mastery of the defining rudiments of the profession. In Nigeria as well as many other nations, library schools serve as training platform for would-be library and information practitioners and those already practising but would want to advance in while on the job. The library schools in Nigeria offer different grades of qualifying degrees which include:

- Diploma in Librarianship
    - Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Librarinship
    - Higher National Diploma (OND) in Librarinship
- Bachelor of Library and Information Studies
- Masters of Library and Information Studies
- PhD in Library and Information Studies
- Courses offered at the Polytechnics
- Courses offered at the Universities

Similarly, upon the completion of these programmes, one may apply to be enlisted as a Certified Librarian with the Librararian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The certification by the LRCN is a prerequisite under the law that a librarian must fulfil before being able to practice.

The library schools also offer opportunities to students in these schools to have associations and societies so that while having a common front to protect the interest of their members, they can also display their leadership and administrative acumen.

Library, Archival and Information Studies Students' Association (LARISSA)

The Library, Archival and Information Studies Students' Association (LARISSA) is one of such associations in Nigeria. Established as a student based society in the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies (LARIS), University of Ibadan, Nigeria, LARISSA is an umbrella body of all registered students in the Department.

The establishment of LARISSA is in tandem with the vision of the University of Ibadan which has since its inception, encouraged Student Unionism. The University is of the opinion that having Student Union will help:

1. To promote the social, cultural, intellectual and sporting activities of its members.
2. To foster the general interests of its members.
3. To control, coperate and exchnage ideas with other external organizations whose aims are acceptable to the union (University of Ibadan, 2009).

LARISSA is administered by elected student executive members who are usually selected across the levels apart from the fresh students who cannot contest based on the university regulation. The executive arm implements the programmes of the association through the assistance of the press arm called the LARISSA Press Organization (LPO). The press arm which supports the activities of the executive arm also curbs the executive in case of excesses.

The department usually designates two or three staff of the department as Staff Advisers to the Union. The Staff Advisers apart from their useful advise, interfaces as the link between the students and the departmental authourity.

In other to achieve its numerous plans for the session, a prespcribed annual due is leveied on its members annually, while funds can also be generated in form of sponsorship from philanthropic individuals and organizations to support the activities of the society.

Relevance of LARISSA to Professional Development

With its motto "Information for Development", LARISSA has the mandate to primarilly cater to the interest of its members who are Information Professionals in training by supporting the department in its bid to make learning and teaching most friendly while impacting knowledge to the students. This is in line with Curry (2000)'s position that Information Professionals and or Library and Information Studies graduates have to be able to navigate information networks competently so as to provide relevant services and materials for their users.

Therefore, the activities of its members are strategically tailored towards achieveing a total man who can work competitively in any information establishment that such an individual is placed. I other to achieve this noble goals, the place of a friendly environment where students can interract and relate on issues that engender physical and professional development in essential.

Over the years, the activities of LARISSA have attracted comendations from different individuals. For the sake of this paper, some of the revelant activities to be considered include :

Creation of awareness on Library and Information Profession

On annual basis, LARISSA organizes orientation and rally exercises through which the members of the university community are enlightened on what library and information profession entails. During this exercise as well, it has been discovered by the kind of questions often asked that a reasonable number of students are oblivious of the profession they are into. As a matter of fact, some students only seek admission into the department with the intention of crossing to other departments after their first year. While the orientation provides them right platform to clear such doubts, some other members of the university community who have misconceptions about librainship also become enlightened

Source: Author

Picture one shows students during a rally exercise showing the University community that access to a book is not the same as reading such books. Simply put, acquisition does not imply utilization.

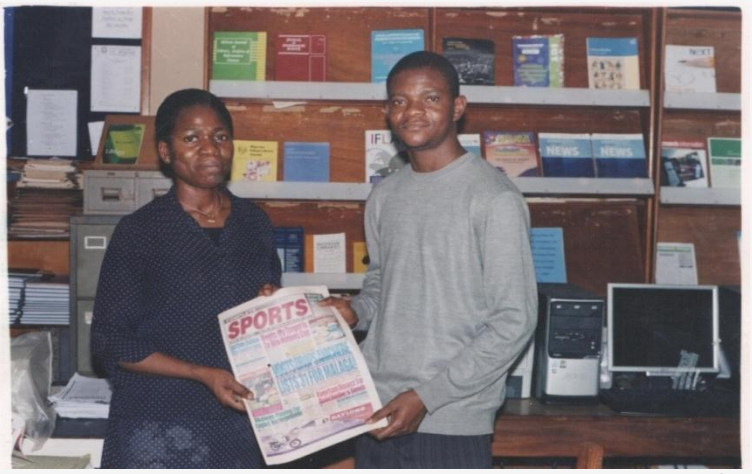
Support with Teaching and Learning Aids

The place of a conducive and friendly teaching and learning environment in achieving optimal academic performance is germane. LARISSA is not oblivious of this and has over the years supported the university in its bid to create a friendly academic environment either by donating or sourcing for support for the department. One of the areas of interest of LARISSA has been the departmental library, which is to the student, what Ugwuanyi, Okwor and Ezeji (2011) have vividly compared to what instruments are to technologists and apparatus to scientists.

The needs of libraries are substantial. Indeed, no can be said to be self-sufficient at providing adequately the information needs of its users (Olajide and Yusuf, 2003). LARISSA has facilitated the donation of books to the departmental library which will be enjoyed not only by the students, but by other researchers that use the library.

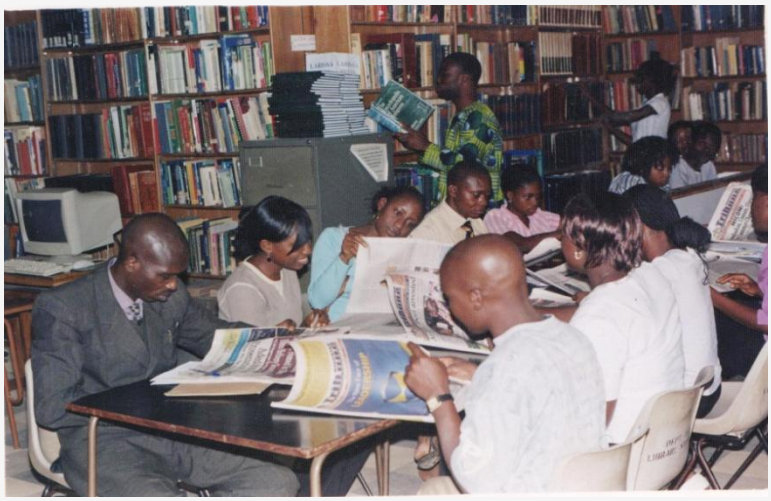
While Bankole and Babalola (2011) have rightly observed that newspaper remain a vital source of enlightenment of the societies due to its abilities to provide up to date information, the cover price of the newspaper has gone up to the extent that an average Nigerian cannot afford the daily purchase, hence the reason why the library has become a place of refuge, LARISSA has always assisted with this subscribing to two national dailies into the library for the users of the library to use. Apart from giving other forms of information on the general happenings in the society, sometimes, there are advert placements for librarians in these national dailies. So it has therefore become a well consulted resource in the library.

LARISSA in achieving this feat approached newspaper firms to donate newspaper to the association as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). Fortunately, the firms saw the request as worthy and deserving.



Source: Author

Picture 2 showing the LARISSA General Secretary Mr Adekunle Temitope presenting one of the newspapers to the Departmental Librarian in 2008



Source: Author

A cross section of the students reading the Nigeria Tribune: one of the newspapers subscribed to by LARISSA

Training Opportunity

Since financial constraint is one of the problems confronting libraries (Ochogwu, 2007), they may be unable to perform some of the essential activities which they should embark upon. Oshilalu (2011) had charged for effective training of librarians as it is not until librarians are in tune with man and his varying demands for information that he can satisfy the information needs of their patrons. In credit to LARISSA, in addition to the organization of public seminars and public lectures, LARISSA has become a veritable platform for hosting, prolific and reasoned scholars on library and information profession to speak on current trends in library and information management.

In the last four years, some of the guest lecturers who have delivered lectures at LARISSA organized programmes included:

- Dr Adio-University Librarian, LAUTECH University Library
- Mr. Samuel Eyitayo, Information Officer, American Embassy in Nigeria
- Dr Onaolapo Soleye, A library owner and former Minister of Finance, Federal Republic of Nigeria, and;
- Professor L.O Aina, Prolific writer and President, Nigerian Library Association

Professor Aina, Dr Adio, and Mr. Eyitayo are all alumni of LARISSA and whose achievements in their various endeavours have become motivations to the students. Such also provides opportunity to give back to the system that produced them, and to serve as mentors to future librarians.

Distinguishing Hard Work

The society has just commenced an annual exercise through which distinguished alumni of the department who are making giant strides in the information profession are honoured for their contributions in the information world. Professor L.O. Aina was recently honoured.

Retraining of Professionals

Apart from the fresh students who have not worked before starting their training, a number of the students are already working in libraries and only need to advance in knowledge. Some of these may not have the privilege of attending conferences and other forms of training while still at work because of the constraints of time and funds. Through LARISSA, some of the highly sought-after presenters are brought to retrain the LIPs on current trends in LIS research without the students having to pay for this.

Improving Writing Skill

Publishing remains an important criterion for the promotion of librarians in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that the status of librarians have been updated from non-academic to academic status. However, librarians in Nigeria have not lived up to this expectation, which has caused many to suffer stagnation in one post for many years (Omoniwa 2003). LARISSA provides an opportunity for students to improve on their writing skills while in school.

Constraints

Lack of funds

A major constraint to the realization of the objectives of the student society is lack of funds to implement some of the plans and programmes of the society. This is because the society relies mainly on stipends from dues and the sponsorship. While one cannot be sure of being able to raise support through sponsorship, some students may also choose not to even pay their dues claiming that they reserve the right not join the association. However, such defaulting students will also enjoy some of the benefits

available to those who have failed. This has led to the call that the membership of LARISSA should be compulsory to all students of the society.

Inconsistence in Policy

Usually, when new administrations assume power, they bring in new programmes and which may be inconsistent with the programmes of the previous administration. One of the reasons for this is that sometimes, the pride associated with wanting to be seen as pioneering new ideas. It must be warned that this position should not be misconstrued to mean that new ideas cannot be injected in the system by new administration; rather, this paper opines that there should be a level of continuity in a system to make it to continually function. One of the benefits of this is that the executive council can leverage on the mistakes of the previous administration(s).

Improper training

LARISSA as a training ground relies solely on elected members some of whom are not trained previously in the art of governance. This has negative effects on the activities of the society.

Conclusion

LARISSA as a stakeholder in the advancement of LIP has contributed immensely to the development of Library and Information Profession through its numerous development centred activities. While this is commendable, there are lots that can still be achieved by the society in view of her meagre resources.

The following are therefore recommended:

1. There should be consistency in the activities of the association.
2. The society should work with the alumni of the department. This can be a strong base for raising funds to sponsor the activities of the association, particularly, activities targeted at improving the LIS.
3. Network with other library schools so that they can exchange ideas and experience.
4. There should be training of newly elected officials before they assume office.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge with profuse appreciation, the support from the two Heads of Department he worked with while with LARISSA: Prof. Morayo Atinmo and Prof. Iyabo Mabawonku for their unwavering supports to LARISSA. I must mention the selfless efforts of the Past Presidents of LARISSA for their contributions towards the advancement of the Society. Some of the activities mentioned in the paper were some of their achievements while in office. Mr. Haruna Obasola (2006/2007), Mr. Onayemi P. Kayode (2008/2009), Mr. Awojuola Lekan (2009/2010), Mr. Ambassador (2010/2011) and Mr. Azeez (2011/2012). Finally, this work is dedicated to Miss Adesola Ogundiminu who passionately charged me to take up the LARISSA Presidency in 2007 and the members of my Executive Cabinet.

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