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Quality Assurance and the Implication for the Management of University Libraries in Nigeria

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Introduction

Quality assurance is a way of measuring, improving, and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value. It may be academic, sports performance, business, or economy. Quality assurance is a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in a social system. Kisailowska (2002) noted that quality assurance principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance of teaching, that later is internally measured and evaluated at a given university, and also externally, during an accreditation process. As a result of this, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy that quality assurance principles regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution.

Monash University (2005) observes that the library, in assuring quality, should be committed to best practices in service provision and resource management, while still ensuring financial and administrative accountability. Nwamarah (2002) observes that the effective management of Nigerian universities depends, to a large extent, on how university managers (including University Librarians) have used available human and material resources. The library needs adequate manpower and facilities to be functional. Peer group assessment is adopted as a means of evaluating compliance to any standard and before quality is assured, there is usually a standard.

Assuring quality means:

- pointing to and naming the elements that are decisive to the evaluation of an educational process or other assessable elements;
- defining the procedures for acting, appointing person and working out the documents necessary for the correct execution of tasks relating to a given entity;
- setting quality indicators; and
- analyzing quality on a regular basis with the use of appropriate tools.

Assuring quality in libraries mean that there must be a striking balance between when should be or what ought to be and what is on ground in the libraries. It is important that a standard be used as a yardstick for development and that minimum standard prescribed for libraries should be closely followed.

Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Libraries

In every organization, the need for quality in the operation of the system is given priority. Factors in library quality assurance include:

- a library that should give its clientele the expected minimum services expected in the 21st century context,
- a growing library, i.e., a library that strives to meet the minimum standard as stipulated by the supervisory agency of that establishment (National Universities Commission in this instance).

Library Services

In the 21st century, library services have shifted from the traditional and routine activities to a more lively, dynamic, and challenging system. More practical and user-friendly services such as Current Awareness Services (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Literature Searching (LS), Indexing and Abstracting (A and A), and functional ICT services, among others, should be given priority. Reference service for undergraduates often involves not only answering specific questions, but also personalized instruction in identifying and locating materials (ALA 2006). Reference service introduces a wide variety of resources in the library system and beyond, connecting undergraduates to specialized library and other campus support services. User education should improve students' ability to use the library. Instruction may be offered as part of course work, workshops, in network-based instruction, in term-paper clinics, and through point-of-use aids in the library.

Minimum Standards

Monash University (2005) describes a quality review that all staff took part in. The review entailed a detailed Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOTs) analysis of the system. A report from this kind of review can form the basis for external review panel such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) team in Nigeria.

The value of a library collection is measured by usability and size. There are standards and guidelines from library agencies and associations, including collection standards. These include total collection and yearly additions, and are correlated with student population. ALA (2006) outlines the provision of authoritative and up-to-date resources that support its mission and the needs of undergraduates. There is no absolute standard for the size of a collection, but resources should adequately support particular user needs. The Ventura College Accreditation team (2004) seemingly opposes this idea, recommending an initial total minimum collection of 50,960 volumes of books, serials, videos, films, and other items to a maximum of 378,000 for 19,000 FTE students. Ifidon (1985) recommends 50,000 volumes for a basic collection and an annual increase of 15,000 volumes. Clap and Jordan (1985) recommend 12,000 volumes for an enrolment of 600 students.

ALA (2006) takes no specific position on quantity and quality of staff, because its document on this only posed this question – what is the ratio of staff to the number of primary clients? Ventura College (2004) has a specific recommendation. It includes a minimum of seven staff members including administrators, librarians, technicians, and other staff, and up to forty for 13,000 students. The school library programme standards and guidelines drawn by the Texas State Library (1997) recommend a staff ratio of one certified Librarian for 0 – 700 Average Daily Attendance (ADA), two for 701 – 1400 ADA; three for 1401 – 2100 ADA, and four for 2101 ADA.

In Nigeria, some agencies recommend three professional librarians to five para-professionals and twenty-five clerical staff, totaling thirty-three as a baseline. ALA states that staff serving undergraduate students should have the knowledge and ability to ensure effective management and use of the resources. They should also have diverse backgrounds to meet the teaching and learning needs of the users. It also requires excellent communication skills. Rittenhouse (1991) supports this assertion by noting that without personable, sympathetic, and competent staff at the point of contact with patrons, no amount of provision in top quality facilities, collections, and programming will succeed.

On budgeting and funding, Budd (1998) claims that some standards recommend 5 or 6 percent of the institution's educational and general expenditures. The recommendation for libraries in Nigeria is 10 percent of the recurrent expenditure of the parent body. This has been interpreted to mean 10 percent of overhead costs. Libraries are resource-intensive organizations. They require the influx of resources, especially financial resources, to fulfill their missions. Academic libraries cannot, and should not, be in a position to generate financial resources for themselves (Budd 1998).

Appropriate funding levels are illustrated by ALA (2006):

- does the budget support appropriate staffing?
- does the budget provide adequate support for baseline services?
- does the budget adequately support the collections policy to provide materials or access to materials in support of library needs?
- is the budget flexible enough to support necessary new programmes and innovations?
- does the library managers have discretion and control of the budget?

These questions go beyond the mere recommendation of percentages. They require a deeper assessment of programs and services.

Seating capacity is another crucial area for standards. Some standards recommend seating capacity in the library that is 25 percent of the student population. ALA (2006) takes a broader approach, and raises some few guiding questions.

- are the facilities safe and environmentally controlled?
- do facilities foster collaboration, communication and cooperation among students?
- are materials adequately safeguarded against loss, mutilation, theft, or other damage?
- is appropriate seating and user space available for the varieties of ways students need to be able to work?
- is space appropriately allocated for use including group and instructional use, study, research, use of ICT?
- are facilities accessible to all users?
- does space allow for cooperative programmes with other libraries and campus units?

The opinion of ALA is reasonable in the sense that if the space requirement is pinned to a particular variable or variables, when the variables change, the space could not be changed immediately and at that instance, a vote of no confidence will be passed on management.

ALA takes a reasonable approach. If the space requirement is pinned to a particular variable or variables, then if variables change, the space requirements will not automatically change. A growing and lively library can also be assessed by examining the flexibility of the management. ICT has been widely discussed in all spheres of life, including the library. The importance of ICT to library development is crucial. Nwamara (2002) asserts that the need for information sharing is more important in a university environment, further stating that ICT facilities help solve the inherent problem faced by libraries in general. A good example of this resource sharing is TEEAL (The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library), which allows access to all available agricultural journals. The Federal Government Virtual Library create by the NUC is a laudable project. Supporting ICT, Eniafe (1986) condemned the idea of storing printed materials alone. He stated that "books waste the time of our users. Users cannot quickly go over 300, 500 and so on, pages within 6 hours. Users easily sleep after 10 -12 minutes of commencement, whereas, in automation, a book of 600 papers can be accessed under one hour."

Enhancing Quality

If there is to be effective library services in universities, standards must be followed. These include collection, staffing, management, funding, and service standards. The issue of funding has been widely discussed. The preliminary draft of Mortenson Centre for International Library Programmes (2005) contained the statement that “after consultation with the University Librarians and Campus Administrators, a decision was made to apply for further MacArthur funding”. This implies that the problem of funding has reached a critical stage in which assistance must be sought from abroad. Aggressive attention to the question of funding will help solve problems of collections, staffing, and space.

To ensure adequate space, librarians should understand library architecture, including advising architects on matters such as offices, reading space and capacity, parking, illumination, and ventilation for the library.

The required caliber and number of staff must be available in each unit of the library. Some sections should as a matter of necessity be staffed by graduate librarians at masters or doctorate levels, including perhaps reference, law library, medical library, acquisitions, and serials. In situation where the library has fewer than ten professional librarians, this becomes difficult. One problem is finding a cadre of dedicated, qualified, and experienced librarians for the rapidly developing services (Okorie 1974). Staff must be trained, re-trained, and retained to achieve optimum output. Mortenson Centre Draft (2005) notes that many University Librarians in Nigeria agreed that the lack of trained library staff and lack of retention of staff was a challenge equal to that of lack of funding.

Library managers have a lot of work to do on the ICT issue. Mortenson Centre Draft (2005) notes that “funding, however is not the only issue, providing access to the electronic resources is critical and it has been difficult for University libraries to establish services that facilitate the use of the information”. It asserts further that selecting and managing electronic resources is a challenge because librarians are not aware of the most recent products or what might best serve their individual community. Ekong (2005) observes that the current ICT infrastructure in Nigeria cannot enable Nigerians or their universities to be fully part of the global information society.

At the same time, university libraries should not forget the security of our hard gotten materials. Ashman (1995) describes how the fire at the Academy of Success of the Soviet Union, Leningrad in February 1988 destroyed 400,000 volumes and a further 1,700,000 were damaged. Bean (1992) claims that thefts alone accounted for 2,261,000 out of 4,326,000, i.e., 52.3 percent among nine 9 different crimes investigated in England in 1989/90. These facts have an important implication for library managers.

Conclusion

The development of effective information delivery system is a key component of University teaching and learning, and modern technology (ICT) greatly enhances such systems. University librarians do not have experience with state-of-the-art library technology, (funding/staffing) creating conceptual difficulties that affect institutional planning. Because training has not been consistently available, technical skills as well as traditional skills vary and are hard to keep up to date. University resources (funds) are severely limited, creating barriers to information access and fostering a dependence on external funding.

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