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Indigenisation of Nigerian Librarianship through Indigenous Knowledge: Exploring its Possibilities

Abstract

Knowledge cannot be separated from the people holding it and the best way to make it appreciated is to present it in a way that represents the beliefs, customs and norms of its origin. This submission makes this paper attempts to find the perfect word between indigenisation and decolonisation as a way of developing Indigenous Librarianship in Nigeria. It settles for indigenisation because indigenisation focuses on the exploitation of the native, local resources to create, share, transform and retain knowledge. It ponders on the historical antecedents of Librarianship in Nigeria to proof that the Nigerian library practices were purely nurtured in the waters of colonialism. It argues that since the practices of Librarianship within any culture are not universal, though they may be normative within that culture, the practices of Indigenous Librarianship can be used for reflecting culturally conditioned notions of the Nigerian IK and its representations through the Nigerian Librarianship. It suggests bibliographic citation and compilation, cataloguing and classification and library automation as areas of Librarianship that can be indigenised. It concludes that libraries thrived in societies where their practices are hinged on IK and recommends that Nigerian librarians should devise a system of describing, codifying and representing local knowledge and its channels of communication in a way that depicts their original contents as against the artificial description and representation imposed on them by the foreign subject organisation and document description schemes.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Indigenisation, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Librarianship, Librarianship, Nigerian Librarianship.

Introduction

Nigeria is colonised by the British and since the early 19th century and middle of 20th centuries when Nigeria got her independence, the Nigerian educational and socio-cultural scenes have been dominated by the beliefs, values and practices of the British and Americans. This makes the Nigerian people to undervalue the skills, knowledge and practices that are peculiar to them, which will subsequently be referred to as *IK* in this paper.

Due to the challenges Nigerians faced in the hand of their colonialist, relying and sustaining their *IK* made it difficult for them to found their library practices and systems in a way that reflect the ideals of their people. The practices of Librarianship and libraries in Nigeria are a replica of library practices in Britain and the United States of America, because of Nigeria's dependence on support, intervention and influence by the foreign nations.

Hence, for the status of Librarianship in Nigeria to change, one of the Nigerian social aspects librarians should exploit is the *IK*. Nigeria as a country blessed with abundant natural and human resources, coupled with diverse cultures spreading across its land, occupied by different ethnic groups with rich cultural knowledge and practices, diverse tribal communities that have long histories of interaction in their daily life (Ebijuwa, 2015), mean that the Nigerian Librarianship begs for practices that identified with the indigenous people.

The foreign library systems seem to have disrupted the practical aspects of the Nigerian *IK* and ways of learning, replacing them with external forms of knowledge that threatens and defeats the appreciation, acceptance, transmission, transformation and preservation of *IK* system, which thus makes the Nigerian *IK* to be struggling for recognitions.

Despite the enormous potential of the Nigerian *IK* systems, it is troubling that the exploit of the local knowledge has been stemmed and arrested by a massive influx of foreign practices and systems dominating the Nigerian library scenes. This becomes a challenge that lingers and demands urgent actions from the Nigerian librarians by harnessing the potential of *IK* through its creation, capturing, codification, representation, preservation, transmission, distribution and utilisation.

Statement of the Problem

The practices of Librarianship within any culture are not universal, though they may be normative within that culture. These practices reflect culturally conditioned notions of knowledge and its representations in a society. When it comes to decisions regarding the representation of *IK* in the libraries of the cultures to which indigenous people have been subordinated, differences in theories of knowledge between the cultures can come into conflict (Gosart, 2021).

Since Librarianship is a profession that is on one side concerned with the revelation, beautification and transformation of cultural heritage, its evolution in every society is based on the needs, yearnings and aspirations of the indigenous people. However, the case of Nigeria is otherwise, practically because Nigeria is a colonised country and Lilley (2021) argues that the development of libraries in the colonised countries was the antithesis of the indigenous approach to the sharing, storage and organisation of knowledge.

At the moment, there is a pressing need in the Nigerian Librarianship practices to develop theories and practices corresponding to the interests of diverse indigenous communities in representing *IK* and culture. This therefore, necessitates it for Librarianship in Nigeria to be indigenised because indigenisation will allow the evolution and formulation of indigenous people-centric theories and practices and the integration of those theories and practices with the existing ones.

Indigenisation of Nigerian Librarianship: Why Not Decolonisation?

Before going deeper in discussing the concept of indigenisation, it is important to briefly explain the concept of decolonisation, because of the nexus between the two concepts and also due to the fact that every indigenised processes, culture and society were hitherto a product of colonisation. This brief explanation is to provide an insight to readers on the convergence and divergence of decolonisation and indigenisation.

Smith, as cited in Lilley (2021) posited that decolonisation which was previously viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government is now recognised as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power. It is about cultural, psychological, and economic freedom for indigenous people with the goal of achieving indigenous sovereignty – the right and ability of indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems (Belfi and Sandiford, 2021).

In respect to indigenisation, the English Dictionary Version 6.0 defines it in two ways, with both definitions focusing on the exploitation of the native, local resources to create, share, transform and retain knowledge. The first definition sees indigenisation as the act of making something more native; transformation of some service, idea etc., to suit a local culture, especially through

the use of more indigenous people in administration, employment, etc. The second definition described indigenisation as the capability to manufacture a product, or supply a service independently within a country instead of relying on foreign manufactures or suppliers.

Indigenisation is considered more suitable for the discourse of this paper because it allows the sustenance of the existing processes and practices and offers opportunity to incorporate and integrate *IK* systems, values and practices into existing library practices and tailor these to meet the needs of the indigenous community. The definitions of indigenisation aptly described the needs Librarianship in Nigeria has to meet, the call it has to respond to. The Nigerian Librarianship urgently needs to be modified, redesigned and structured to be independent of exploration, design and transformation of the local knowledge to produce, organise, disseminate and utilise information products and services in ways that suit the needs of the native people.

Indigenisation of the Nigerian Librarianship activities can be described as involving the process of focusing, practicing, restoring status to the Nigerian *IK* and society by rediscovering its indignity and identity from the obscurity enforced by colonisation (Smith, 2012; Tuck and Yang, 2012). The authentication process of indigenisation of Librarianship in Nigeria would involve evaluating the aspects of the Nigerian Librarianship and identifying how the practices can be returned to a state that aligns with the Nigerian traditional practices. The indigenisation process will further be strengthened by identifying and reclaiming the lost or eroded practices of the Nigerian Librarianship.

Lilley (2021) argues that indigenisation agenda is an interdependent process, which makes a collective approach from across Librarianship possible. For indigenisation of the Nigerian Librarianship to be fully effective, it would involve institutions, organisations and individuals to undergo a transformative process. Although, doing this would still demand similar steps of negotiation at the decolonisation process. The foundation of indigenisation of the Nigerian Librarianship should be built on indigenous truths rather than accepting the constructs and interpretations formed from western knowledge perspectives. This will then lead to the reconstruction of local knowledge by using a lens that privileges indigenous orientations and perspectives.

For indigenisation to occur in the domain of Nigerian Librarianship, the aspects of education, culture, social orientations, institutions, associations, individuals etc., should be efficiently and effectively interdependent because indigenisation heavily relies on culture, education and psychological applications (Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004). Hence, the focus of an indigenisation agenda should be concentrated on transforming current structures of the Nigerian Librarianship to be inclusive and meet the needs of indigenous communities.

Indigenisation of Librarianship in Nigeria: A Position of History

There is a dearth of literature focusing on colonialism, indigenisation and libraries in Nigeria. However, for the sake of this paper, the researchers use existing literature on history of libraries and evolution of Librarianship in Nigeria to draw inference on how colonisation has been affecting the Nigerian library settings. Literature has recorded that the first major libraries established in Nigeria were the Federal Ministry of Justice and Federal High Court libraries, established in Lagos in 1901 and 1902 respectively. Other notable libraries were established at Kings College in 1909 and Queen's College in 1910. Tom Jones had a library established in the colony of Lagos in 1918 (Aliyu and Akewukereke, 2008).

Historical accounts have noted that libraries were neither primarily established for Nigerians nor to promote Nigerian indigenous culture. For instance, Wrong and Vischer (1939) reported that access to the collection of Tom Jones library was primarily reserved for the Europeans and only a few Nigerians can afford the cost of registration as users of the library. In Wrong and Visher's survey in 1939, they were quoted as saying, "Out of the 152 subscribers of the Lagos Library, only seven were Africans."

That implies that at the infancy of Librarianship in Nigeria, Nigerians have not been adequately considered to be active players in their library scenes. Another effort of colonisation that seems like assistance was the grant of a sum of 6,000 US dollars to the colonial government by the Carnegie Corporation of New York for the development of public libraries in Nigeria. The grant facilitated the acquisition of foreign collections and aided the establishment of the Lagos Township Library, later transformed to Lagos Public Library in 1946.

To further buttress the argument that Nigerian Librarianship was birthed in the pool of colonisation, Aguolu and Aguolu (1997) reported that the Carnegie Corporation sponsored a

survey of library needs of British West Africa, undertaken by Margaret Wrong and Hans Vischer in 1939. In 1940, the report led to another intervention from Carnegie Corporation with another grant of 27, 323 US dollars given to the Nigerian Government to support the development of libraries.

In 1943 during the World War II, the British Council arrived in Nigeria and reading rooms were established across the country to promote British culture and ideas. Reading rooms were filled with British newspapers, political tracts, bulletins, and radio propaganda about the on-going World War II (Aguolu and Aguolu, 1997; Aliyu, 2012).

In 1946, the Lagos Town Council and British Council jointly founded the Lagos Public Library, which replaced the Lagos Township Library of 1932. In the same year, a travelling library scheme was also launched in Lagos. These libraries were established with the motives of promoting literacy – reading and speaking of English language – among Nigerians, in contrast to promoting the Nigerian culture or values of Nigerians.

The Yaba College of Technology was established with its library in 1947 with little or no regard for the needs of the local people. Also in 1948, the University College Ibadan, with its library, was established as an arm of London University. The major motives of establishing those institutions were to strengthen the dominance of foreigners and foster the intellectual enslavement Nigerians have been tucked in by teaching and exposing Nigerians to the lifestyles of the foreigners.

Through the leadership motivations of W.J. Harris, in 1950, Kalu Chima Okorie became the first professional indigenous librarian in Nigeria (Nzotta, 1984). The Nigerian Regional Government further made some efforts to indigenise the reading rooms established during the World War II by the British Council. But this was unachievable (Saliu, 2011; Aliyu, 2018). Saliu (2011) commented that the plan of the Nigerian Regional Government on indigenising its library services was inadequate and the government of the Northern Region later appointed Mr. F.A. Scharr to look into the affairs of libraries in the Northern Region.

The landmark UNESCO Seminar of 1953 offered a lifeline for the renaissance of Librarianship in Nigeria by canvassing for the promulgation of library legislation in Nigeria. UNESCO (1954) documented that the Seminar emphasised that only legislation can empower the appropriate

authorities to provide the services and ensure adequate financial support and efficient administration according to a national standard. It further stressed that only legislation can define the functions of the providing authority, create the conditions in which it may fulfill those functions, and ensure development.

Though some regions were able to legislate their library practices, but those legislations failed to consider and address the needs of local people. Another opportunity to design library services that should address and support the yearnings and aspirations of the local people by providing adequate and quality information materials was the establishment of the National Library of Nigeria in 1964 (Aguolu, 1984). The library is the national repository where every Nigeriana publication is housed for posterity to access and use.

The history of Librarianship in Nigeria is incomplete without the acknowledgement of some scholars like Nnamdi Azikiwe who donated his collection to the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Library; Obafemi Awolowo who bequeathed his collection of the University of Ife Library, now Obafemi Awolowo University and others who have the foresight to predict that Nigeria may later be trapped in the corners of imported knowledge. Their efforts demonstrated their commitment to the revival and engendering of the Nigerian culture to the Nigerian social practices by donating and bequeathing their personal collection to the academic libraries, so that emerging scholars would be exposed to the inherent richness of their local knowledge and groomed with it. They believed doing this would facilitate the sharing and transferring of local knowledge among the people (Aguolu, 1984).

Setting the Ground for the Nigerian Indigenous Librarianship through *IK*

The term *IK* was first used as "tacit knowing" by Michael Polanyi (1958) in his book *Personal Knowledge*. In his later work, *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), Polanyi made the assertion that "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966). Polanyi affirmed that not only that there is knowledge that cannot be adequately articulated by verbal means, but also that all knowledge is rooted in tacit knowledge. Since then, tacit knowledge has been modified to mean local knowledge, informal knowledge, unprocessed knowledge, inbuilt knowledge, etc.

Warren (1991) described *IK* as the knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions,

and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities. *IK* is related to a particular environmental or geographical zone. It is always shared orally, through tales, proverbs, songs and many other narrative forms. *IK* penetrates deeply into a wide range of disciplines, such as agriculture, medicine, pharmacology, psychology and astronomy (El Sharief, Mudawi and Mohamed, 2021).

According to Chugh (2015), *IK* are skills, ideas and experiences that are possessed by people but are not codified and may not necessarily be easily expressed. It is knowledge that people are not often aware of its possession or how it can be valuable to others. Effective transfer of local knowledge generally requires extensive personal contact, regular interaction (Goffin and Koner, 2011) and trust. *IK* can only be revealed through practice in a particular context and transmitted through social networks (Schmidt and Hunter, 1993). *IK* is often captured when the knowledge holder joins a network or a community of practice (Goffin and Koner, 2011).

IK has both social and anthropological aspects. From a social perspective, *IK* is associated with cultural behaviours and practices; it cannot be understood in isolation from its social context (El Sharief, Mudawi and Mohamed, 2021), while the anthropological aspect of *IK* is concerned with the modification of cultural behaviours and practices for the evolution of new patterns of cultural behaviours and practices that stimulate the sense of appreciation of the local people.

Libraries and the library profession are currently experiencing one of the most difficult periods in modern history (Kumar, 2020) because of inadequate attention to or lack of priority of *IK* in some colonised countries, which Nigeria is part of. Cherry and Mukunda (2015) noted that *IK* systems are characterised by their holistic view of the world. This is to mean that knowledge cannot be separated from the individual or group holding it. These features of *IK* require librarians to work closely with other Social Sciences and *IK* specialists to set up strategies for *IK*'s preservation and documentation.

IK is an emerging aspect of Librarianship and has gained wider acceptance in the present global society which has previously generated a lot of concern on the need for its preservation for posterity, access and use (Ebijuwa, 2015). This made Nakata (2007) to stress that managing *IK* is imperative because it is concerned with maintaining knowledge for future utility and about re-

energising contemporary expressions of these traditions to be meaningful in contemporary contexts.

Therefore, to focus Librarianship towards local knowledge in every nation would solidify the arguments for invigorating, reviving and advancing the status of Librarianship in countries where its status is gradually enervating. Viewing the work of librarians through the lens of providing, promoting, designing, integrating and facilitating access to local knowledge through traditional access-oriented offers a way to clarify the role of librarians across different societies; this will inspire the learning-oriented aspects of Librarianship towards local knowledge and to be more holistically assessing its impact on developing and sustaining indigenous practices.

Bridging the Gap between *IK* and Librarianship in Nigeria: Indigenous Librarianship as the Way Out

The concepts of Librarianship and other information management institutions were foreign constructs to indigenous people when those institutions were first introduced into their traditional lands. As pre-literate societies, indigenous people placed their emphasis of knowledge retention primarily on oral transmission (Lilley, 2021), which are recorded and documented within the purview of their social aspects and needs. This notion justified the dynamism of practices of Librarianship in various societies by designing their practices and standards that inherently reflect their norms, values and beliefs, which have been recently categorised as Indigenous Librarianship.

Indigenous Librarianship, according to (Brown, 2017; Burns et al., 2015), is a developing branch of Librarianship. It emerged in the 1970s in response to indigenous advocacy movements and the reconciliation efforts of states' governments, primarily in the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. As a theory, Indigenous Librarianship examines how the cultural practices, empirical conditions, and political aspirations of indigenous communities shape the notion of knowledge and the practices of knowledge organisation and management that rest on this notion. It utilises the categories and research procedures developed by LIS and extends these using insights regarding the origins and forms of knowledge derived from indigenous scholarship. This combination enables Indigenous Librarianship to “unite” the Librarianship field and indigenous perspectives on knowledge, theory, and methods (Burns et al., 2015).

Indigenous Librarianship seeks to understand how specific qualities of knowledge shape the generation, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge. Unlike the traditional theory, Indigenous Librarianship applies a conception of knowledge as events or processes. Indigenous Librarianship scholars treat knowledge as happenings, as “coming to knowing” or “ways of knowing” (Little Bear and Aikenhead, as cited in Gosart, 2021).

Indigenous Librarianship is a set of practices that operates along two parallel tracks. The first focuses on preserving and revitalising indigenous library institutions and knowledge systems. The second fosters procedures and norms to guide responsible and respectful care for materials with indigenous content that are preserved outside of indigenous communities (Gosart, 2021). Indigenous Librarianship is a political project – a form of social action supporting the interests and aspirations of indigenous communities. Indigenous Librarianship seeks to advance the rights of indigenous communities to knowledge and, by so doing, supports the struggle of these communities’ developments toward self-government, stewardship of land, and revitalisation of languages.

Osuchukwu and Udeze (2021) argued that the fact that *IK* is predominantly tacit knowledge that is passed from generation to generation, and exchanged through personal communication, culture, rituals and demonstration, deems it suitable for well-packaged resources in libraries, which can serve as foundation for Indigenous Librarianship. They further submitted that libraries are great platforms for knowledge generation and a basis for enriching information. Their roles have continued to evolve to include cultural knowledge and identification with the people they serve. Thus, Nigerians libraries should strive to live up to the expectations and the responsibilities placed on them by the emergence of Indigenous Librarianship.

Some Areas of Librarianship Where Indigenisation Can Aid Indigenous Librarianship in Nigeria

1. **Bibliographic Citation and Compilation:** These are integral aspects of Library and Information Science that are concerned with the identification, arrangement and organisation of sources, information and document used and consulted in the conduct of academic research. To do these in tandem with the global standards is to use the

American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Vancouver, etc., styles of referencing and bibliographic compilation.

Indigenous Librarianship in Nigeria can be promoted through the academic institutions by developing their citation and referencing styles. An example worthy of being mentioned in this regard is the University of Ibadan Manual of Style (UIMS), which has been in use in the University since 2005. The UIMS facilitates consistency in the presentation style of academic writing, which also creates a unique identity for all academic publications of the University of Ibadan.

2. **Library Automation:** This has been described by scholars as the integration of ICT to perform routines and services that are hitherto performed by human beings in the library. It is not that there is absence of library automation in Nigerian libraries, but planning and designing library automation with utmost consideration for the *IK* is a great way to promote Indigenous Librarianship. This was what Na'angap Daship, a librarian working with the National Library of Nigeria did in 2017 by developing a library package on generating a back of the book index using Microsoft Word. This package has advantage over indexing software by enhancing easy to select and organize indexable terms, easy to identify sub-title, critical examination and analysis of terms and save time (Na'angap Daship, forum communication, November 28th, 2017).
3. **Cataloguing and Classification:** These are one of the most important and concentrated aspects of Librarianship that are concerned with the bibliographic descriptions and subject analysis of information materials. However, it is troubling that most Nigerian publications are struggling to fit in into the frame of the subject headings – terms and phrases – in the foreign classification schemes. Also, the cataloguing codes, AACR II and RDA are neither the efforts of Library Association of the African continent or the Nigerian Library Association. This sometimes makes it challenging for cataloguers to adequately describe local publications.

Although, the Cataloguing and Classification Section of the NLA, along with cataloguers and classifiers have worked to bridge the gap in the subject analysis and publications descriptions by devising in-house rules, authority files and Cutter Numbers for local names, but it would be ideal for the Nigerian cataloguing and classification practitioners

to initiate standards that would reflect local practices by dwelling on the in-house rules and authority files – of various libraries – to design a Nigerian classification system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The practices of Librarianship in every society are being shaped by endogenous and exogenous factors. However, in societies where Librarianship thrives, endogenous factors – one of those factors is *IK* – dominate the practices, procedures and standards and play the defining roles in the standardisation of Librarianship as a vital component of the information spectrum. This therefore, is to imply that Nigerian librarians should be the frontrunners championing their own standards, instituting practices and redesigning the themes and trends of their profession. This will go a long way in projecting Librarianship as a profession that is deeply rooted and centralised in exploring the beauty of *IK*; collect, document, preserve, disseminate and utilise it for the enhancement and sustenance of cultural inclinations of the Nigerian society. Doing this will awaken the sense of inclusion of Nigerians towards Librarianship, build harmony between librarians and library stakeholders, increase the awareness of libraries among indigenous people and encourage them to cultivate and exhibit positive attitudes towards Librarianship as a whole.

Based on the above submission, this paper hereby makes the following recommendations:

1. The NLA should have a section devoted to the promotion of *IK* and practices. Doing this will increase the attention given to the Nigerian *IK* and eventually promote and project *IK* to the relevant stakeholders, communicating the achievements and supports needed to sustain Nigeria's *IK* practice.
2. Availability, accessibility and utilisation of Indigenous publications which are known as Nigeriana Collection in the Nigerian context should be encouraged. This would aid in the appreciation and recognition of the Nigerian local knowledge, both within and outside Nigeria.
3. Nigerian librarians should devise a system of describing, codifying and representing local knowledge and its channels of communication in a way that depicts their original contents as against the artificial description and representation imposed on them by the foreign subject organisation and document description schemes.

4. The Nigerian Library Schools should encourage *IK* research oriented. This will facilitate identifying the aspects of the *IK* that are not adequately covered, which can be brought to limelight by designing library services that will help their revival.

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