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## Scientific Research in Librarianship: A Panacea for Library Development in Nigeria

Tony I. Obaseki  
*Ambrosealli University, aligaji4@yahoo.com*

Salisu Dasuki Ibrahim  
*Federal Polytechnic, Nassarawa, Nigeria*

Julliet N. Momoh  
*Ambrosealli University*

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## **Scientific Research in Librarianship: A Panacea for Library Development in Nigeria**

Tony. I. Obaseki  
University Library  
Ambrosealli University

Salisu Dasuki Ibrahim  
Readers Service Librarian  
Federal Polytechnic Library Nassarawa

Julliet N. Momoh  
University Library  
Ambrosealli University

### **Introduction**

Research in librarianship is a core aspect of library education and any library school programme. Day (1997) observes that, "it is a means for students and librarians alike to investigate the cause and effect of phenomenon as it affects the profession and come out with possible solutions". It also allows students try out principles and theories they have learnt in the classroom.

Research is the arrival at a dependable solution to a problem through collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Osuala (1993) says that, "it is the most important tool for advancing knowledge". Ochogwu (2007) states that "research is needed in various operational activities of the library profession, especially into why people do not consult the library." Research can be pure or basic, which is uses theories to investigate questions and phenomena, and applied research that uses accumulated data and knowledge to investigate a particular problem. Kpeke (1997) states that, "findings of a scientific research are powerful tools in national and curriculum planning". By implication the advancement of a discipline is based on the strength, types, and outcomes of researchcarried out and how these findings are judiciously put to use.

Research in librarianship investigations often discusses theoretical phenomena and findings rather than testing relationships between variables. In line with that, Ochogwu (2007) states that:

The library profession is full of assumptions about their services. It is often satisfied with the quality of resources provided. But a lot of studies have shown that these assumptions are very faulty. Meaningful empirical research studies will reveal problem areas with operational activities with a view of finding dependable solutions to them in other to enhance the development process

Oduwole and Ikhizana (2007) assert that, "research output in librarianship is poor, as fifty percent of the librarians sampled with up to ten years experience have no publications." They further argue that the growth and development of any profession depends on extensive research.

This does not augur well for librarianship, as the application of scientific findings in formulating strategies and policies is necessary to enhance library service. For research findings to be considered

adequate, they must be based on evidence and experimentation. Osuala (1993) says that “experimentation is often confused with the scientific method by laymen who equate experimentation with physical science and further equate physical science with science itself”. Despite its scientific rigors, experimentation is only one aspect of the scientific method which itself involves a great number of activities and is widely accepted.

Panda (1997) says that “librarian researchers unknowingly are fast becoming laymen in research.” A majority of research in librarianship is pure research. Researchers in the profession shy away from scientific (experimental) research. In same vein Obaseki (2008) states that “out of about 23 students admitted into the Bayero University postgraduate library school for masters in 2004, only about 1% used inferential statistical tools such as Chi Square, t-test, anova, etc., in analyzing data for their studies”. The implication is that research findings of 99% of these professional librarians will not be considered an input for reconfiguring policies for libraries. This system impinges on the development of librarianship as a profession and a discipline, in an information age where librarians need to play key roles in preserving abundant knowledge.

### **Factors that Inhibit Research in Librarianship**

- Dearth of research-minded librarians

The fact that most librarians are not inclined toward scientific research hinders the growth of the library profession. Library educators are responsible for the fact that most library students do not delve into scientific research, which stems from fear and ignorance of applied research methods. It is hard to find training in statistics in most Nigerian library schools, and most such training is given by someone from mathematics or education. Busha and Harter (1981) cited in Powel (1997) state that:

Logically the major responsibility for imparting research skills to librarians must belong to the LIS programmes. Unfortunately, this is not universally held view and the track record of LIS programmes regarding the teaching of research skills is not outstanding.

The major responsibility for imparting research skills to librarians must belong to the LIS programmes. Unfortunately, this is not a universally-held view and the track record of LIS programmes regarding the teaching of research skills is not outstanding. These antecedents negate the selection of research methods by students and professional librarians alike as questions such as why, how, and when to use proper statistics propels them to alternative research methods whose findings are less useful to policy formulation.

- Lack of Requirement for Practicing Librarians to Participate in Research

Missing zeal on the part of librarians to investigate phenomena affecting the library is an impediment to scientific research in librarianship. Librarians view research investigations as requirements for certification and not for the development of the profession. Practicing librarians have a lackluster attitude toward the development of the profession. This is exhibited by most librarians’ lack of a record of publication. Furthermore, this lackadaisical attitude inhibits the growth of the profession.

The perception of the librarian in the eyes of the public reflects how the profession is evaluated and valued. The answer to the problems with the professional status of librarians lies in adequate research, because only scientific research can earn the desired response from funding and governing authorities.

- Funding

Funding of research in library and information science is bleak. The funding regime at the moment does not encourage applied research; for example, applications for research funding are based on research excellence rather than relevance to practice. Goulding (2007) states that, “there is no reason why a piece of research could not fulfill the criteria for research excellence and be practically relevant, but recommenders draw distinction between research and practice per se.” Moreover, Brophy (2006) asserts that:

The picture on research funding in LIS is not as bleak as sometimes painted, as researches in LIS is often supported with funding from JISC, Research councils and EU, but often times they are ICT dominated and that finding funding for practitioner based or practitioner-led researches was difficult. This uncertainty over funding for practice based research to inform professional practice is just one issue that has been dogging UK LIS professionals and librarianship profession universally.

This implies that applicants for research funding in librarianship still must generally be an individual scholar.

### **Implications**

The introduction of novel concepts such as information and communication technology in libraries has made libraries centers of attraction. This has not dispelled the notion that the discipline or profession is still very unpopular in Nigeria (Obaseki 2008). People still tend to find it hard to comprehend why someone would study library science. The first question is where will you work after graduation from the college? The assumption is that a library graduate ends up in the library, which to many are unmaintained building where books are warehoused.

This has led to the drastic reduction of potential library students, with many leaving the profession, and too many who take refuge in the profession as a ploy to leave home for a university environment with no real zeal for librarianship. These persons will not make any meaningful contribution to the field. This has taken its toll on the profession, with trained librarians working in organizations such as financial institutions, not in information management capacities but as cashiers, drivers, and courier handlers.

The profession has witnessed a decline in its public rating in Nigeria. There is little or no scientific research emanating from library schools or practicing librarians, and, therefore, there are no findings to be applied for solving problems in the profession. Research studies carried out in library schools are more like term papers and reports.

### **Solutions**

For librarians to take their place in this information age as the real information scientists:

- Researchers in the discipline should be made to embark on scientific (quasi-experimental) research so the study findings can be used in solving persisting national problems in librarianship. Shera, cited in Grotzinger (1981), asserts that a “specific part of the course of study for a graduate in librarianship should be the acquiring of knowledge of principles and methods of research as applied to the investigation of library problems together with the ability to evaluate research results especially research in librarianship.”
- Practicing librarians should be required to carry out investigation on phenomena affecting their libraries and librarianship in general. They are in the system, and, by implication, they know the nature of library problems and how to go about solving them.

- Teaching research methodology and statistics in library schools should be a matter of utmost importance. Library educators are more informed about library variables and terminologies and will use them in exploring research statistics unlike the visiting statistics educator from other departments.
- The nomenclature of the discipline should be changed to suit modern challenges and changes in the practical aspect of the profession. This will help bring the discipline into conformity with what is obtainable in the more advanced areas of the world; instead of library and information sciences, why not "Information Management Science?"
- The Nigeria Library Association should wake up to its task of not only policy formulation but implementation. A sure way of doing this is political lobbying of the NUC or the legislative arm of Nigeria into passing a bill to our own advantage.

## Conclusion

The establishment of relevant research methodology and statistics for library schools in Nigeria cannot come at a better time, especially given the proliferation of information. Nigeria cannot afford to be in isolation. There is hope that Nigerian professional librarians will take steps to address recent shortcomings, advancing the enabling environment for the development and growth of the profession in Nigeria.

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