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Modern Trends in Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

There had been developmental changes in the society because of its dynamic nature. In view of this, the traditional method of discharging responsibilities in most fields of human endeavour is gradually going into extinction and thus, the need to move along with times. This paper therefore focuses on the challenges of modern trends in Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria. The paper discusses the nature and constraints of information service provisions traditionally. It further accounts for historical antecedents of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria. It also examines the challenges of modern trends in Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria. The paper concludes with suggestions that can allow Library and Information Science Education withstand the modern trends.

Introduction

In Nigeria, it was glaring that between 1842 and 1950 various educational institutions had been established. The missionaries spearheaded the establishment of primary and secondary schools before the involvement of the colonial government. The employment privilege for products of these basic schools as interpreters and clerks for the missionaries and colonial government respectively metamorphosed to more enrolment of pupils in schools, thus the need for more schools. The yearnings towards educational advancement in the British West African colonies particularly in the areas of technological and vocational education resulted to the emergence of Yaba College of Technology in 1934. About a decade later, a University College was set up in Ibadan as an affiliate of University of London and since then, many schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities continue to spring up.

For effective teaching and learning, an information service centre like a library is essential. Ahmed (1996) while quoting Dorothy Obi noted that "good teachings demand that students be exposed to relevant information resources for effective understanding and exposing knowledge"(p.109). Perhaps, this was why the missionaries or school proprietors assembled pamphlets and other literature in a specific place for user consultation. However, the establishment of a library is a pre-requisite as soon as an institution of higher learning is set up. Before the Nigeria independence in 1960, all types of libraries (school, public, special, private and academic) have been in existence.

With the existence of such libraries, the major constraint was the dearth of indigenous trained or professional personnel in the field of librarianship.

The traditional or manual method of routines or information service delivery in Nigeria, dominated the 20th century. This shows that while some libraries in other parts of world have been transforming their services to automation and digitalization, manual techniques of information material selection, acquisition, processing, preservation, organization and service provision are still prominent in some developing countries like Nigeria.

With the adoption of modern technology and more importantly in this 21st century, the traditional method of service provision is astronomically becoming obsolete. In this regard, it is not only becoming a challenge but a threat to any institution or establishment whose activities or services are completely carried out manually. Specifically, the curricular of library schools (Departments of Library and Information Science) have a lot of challenges. This could therefore have negative implications on the products of such schools in terms of services, employment and relevance.

It is not enough for libraries to be established but also to be effectively managed. The quality of services by a given library depends to a large extent on the quality of its staff. Ologbosaiye (2002) averred that the human resources of any library constitute an important component of its organization. To him, "a well-trained and competent staff is an asset to any organization"(p.5). However, if the library is inadequately staffed, relevant materials may not be stocked nor well organized. The absence or inadequacy of qualified staff according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) could create problems of bibliographic and physical accessibility to the information resources.

In view of the foregoing, there was the need for a formalized and standard institute in Nigeria for the training of libraries since the rudimentary/informal trainings and that of British Associateship of Library Association (ALA) did not meet the demands needed Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) has identified the following as factors necessitating the emergence of library and information science education in Nigeria:

(a)   Increase in the number of established libraries;
(b)   Growth and expansion of certain libraries especially the University College Ibadan',
(c)   High employment prospects for the few professional librarians (expatriates) in the international labour market;
(d)   Request for trained manpower for complex and scientific nature of library operations;
(e)   Dynamism of knowledge or changes in the nature and role of information in the society both in content and container.
(f)   Differences in the socio-political situation from country to country.

Nature of Library Services in Nigeria

Libraries are service oriented institutions charged with the responsibility of providing the right information to the right user in the right format and at the right time. The guiding principles of library services contained in Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science as highlighted by Nwalo (2000) are relevant in this regard. These include:
(i)   Books are for use
(ii)   Every user his book
(iii)   Every book its users
(iv)   Save the time of the user
(v)   The library is a growing organism

For effective services and in order to meet the aforementioned five laws of library science, librarians and other support staff geared towards certain efforts or activities which include:

(a)   Selection of information resources: This is a library routine required to be carried out by a librarian or a skilled library personnel which involves the choosing of the right or most relevant materials out of the abundance for the target patrons. Librarians have to consult bibliographical tools like bibliographies, publishers' catalogue, book reviews, abstracts, etc., to facilitate the selection, taking into cognizance the available funds and subject coverage.

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(b)   Acquisition of materials: A successful selection of materials will enhance their purchase. Using the Local Purchasing Order (LPO), a publisher or book seller/vendor is assigned the responsibility of supplying the selected materials to the particular library. This can take weeks, months or even year in a traditional system.

(c)   Processing: The materials ordered for when they arrived, are critically checked against any discrepancy or ensuring that what were ordered for are those supplied. Accessioning, stamping, pasting of book card and label are further done for the materials.

(d)   Organization: Since accessibility and use of the acquired materials are very important, libraries have to describe the materials bibliographically (cataloging) as well as providing them with classification numbers for easy arrangement and retrieval. Abstracting and indexing activities are sometimes carried out by librarians in order to enhance usability of the materials. In fact, all efforts made could be a waste if the materials are not well catalogued or classified.

(e)   Resource sharing: This is a programme where two or more libraries formed an agreement of cooperation between or among themselves. It is glaring that no library can be an island or possess all needed materials, thus, inter library cooperation or resource sharing is an alternative measure of meeting the needs of users.

(f)   Charging and discharging of materials: Most libraries have provision for material loan to users. It is quite obvious that some users would like to consult certain relevant materials at home, thus a loan privilege is usually provided for registered users for certain period. The material loan without any doubt promotes accessibility and use of the resources, hence making the library to achieve its goals.

(g)   Reference services: This is one of the fundamental services in the library geared towards assisting users in terms of information dissemination and materials provision such as Ready reference, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Current Awareness Services (CAS). For instance, ready reference requires immediate provision of information to the needs of users which can come in form of questions like "What", "Who", "Where", "How", etc. Current Awareness Service involves an up to date information provision relevant to the user community or target users, while Selective Dissemination of Information is an advanced information provision that required effective selection of information resources on the research areas of users. In essence, a librarian embarks on literature search, and collate relevant materials that can satisfy the research activity of the user.

In this contemporary time, it is important to ascertain the method of rendering the aforementioned activities or services by Nigerian libraries. Quite a number of scholars posited that most of libraries in Nigeria still adopt the traditional technique. For instance, Oyinloye (2004) opined that:

> It may sound unbelievable but it is true that even as of today many library operations such as acquisition, processing, information retrieval and readers' services are still being performed manually. The public card catalogue and the visible index are the finding tools for books and journals respectively. Indexes and abstracts are equally still manually compiled (p.42).

The prominence of the traditional technique of library services in Nigeria like some other developing countries can be attributed to the Nigerian library schools which still maintain curricula that are manually oriented. Presently, it is a constraint to the library schools, librarians, libraries and even the users that some information materials are no longer traditionally published but electronically. In this situation, there is the tendency for any library which fails to move along with the modern trend to lose credibility and patronage and which can also affect the library schools. To this end, Kawatra (2008) submitted that "the transformation due to the rapid development and diffusion of information technology calls for innovations in generation, collection, storage, processing and dissemination of information and knowledge" (p.vii). Consequently, the modern trend is a challenge to library and information science education in Nigeria.

Historical Antecedents

Library and information science education (LISE) like other branches of knowledge is significant for societal development. The transformation from the industrial revolution to information revolution by most parts of the world, is a testimony that information is an essential asset for human, economic, political, social and technological developments. In view of this, institutions charged with the responsibility of producing skilled manpower for library and information service also become very imperative. Libraries according to Gonhgchi (2008) cannot function efficiently and effectively without appropriate skilled personnel who are dedicated to their jobs. He further

postulated that education and training requirements of personnel for library and information service become fundamental issues not only for the profession but also the nation.

The agitation for training institutions in Nigeria for library and information science education during the early period of the 20th century has presently resulted to proliferation of library schools. As at 1948, all types of educational institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary), had been established in Nigeria. Between 1900 and 1948, it was evident that various kinds of libraries were in existence not minding their degree of development. The dearth of skilled personnel to be in charge of such libraries necessitated library and information science education in Nigeria. Most of the libraries then were managed by the expatriates; unfortunately they were also inadequate.

The UNESCO seminar of 1953 held at the University College Ibadan was instrumental among other factors that lead to the establishment of the Institute of Librarianship at the same University College, Ibadan in 1959. The resolutions of the seminar gingered the participants to strongly agitate for a formalized training institute on library and information science education. However, the first set of students was enrolled in 1960. Prior to this, there had been rudimentary training programmes for Library Assistants coordinated by some libraries. There was also Associateship (British) Library Association (ALA) certificate programme organized by University of London. This afforded some Nigerians among other Africans to enroll for the programme which was of two parts. The examination for the first part took place in Nigeria but the second part was at Great Britain. It is against this backdrop that Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) revealed that:

> The only method of becoming a librarian in Nigeria, as in other British Commonwealth countries, was by taking the Associateship of the British Library Association (ALA), either by attending British library schools, or by the correspondence courses, offered by the British Association of Assistant Librarians, or by part-time study. This was the practice after the collapse of the regional library training institute, established at Achimota in 1944, to help prepare the first corps of librarians for Nigeria and other Anglophone countries of West Africa. The three year Experimental library school in Achimota College Ghana lasted only for one year (p.135).

It is pertinent to add that the British Council and the Governments of Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nigeria and Sierra Leone (through the funds provided by the Carnegie corporation) jointly financed the Achimota library school in 1944. The curriculum of the Institute of Librarianship at Ibadan was found to be British oriented which cannot have a significance effect on the socio-cultural system in Nigeria. This requires a change of the curriculum which later took place through a financial grant of 112 dollars by Carnegie Corporation in 1963. The Institute ran Diploma programme until 1966 when it stopped to admit students except for Post-graduate Diploma in Library Studies. Presently, the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies of the University of Ibadan run bachelor degree including masters and PhD programmes in library and information studies, Publishing, Archival, and Health Information Management.

With the establishment of more libraries in Nigeria, it was discovered that the Institute of Librarianship, Ibadan was not able to produce the required Librarians to man such libraries thus the need for more library schools. Though, most of the libraries in the southern part of Nigeria as at 1970 were manned by indigenous libraries, the expatriates according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) still dominated that of Northern libraries. Mohammed (2003), in a related development submitted that the report of F.A. Sham's survey of the library needs in Northern Nigeria (in 1963) gave birth to the establishment of the second library school at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1968. This university started running diploma and bachelor degree programmes but presently the Department of Library and Information Science runs its programmes to PhD level, though the diploma aspect has been shifted to the Institute of Education of the university. Today, the products of the library schools in Ibadan and Zaria have made significant contribution to the development of librarianship in Nigeria.

The year 1977 and 1978 also witnessed the establishment of Department of Library Science in Bayero University Kano and University of Maiduguri respectively. The two library schools presently run Bachelor, Masters and PhD programmes though the two schools are yet to have a sound footing in their PhD programme. The eastern Nigeria universities have their chances of setting up library schools in 1980s. Prominent among them are University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1983, and Imo State University (but not Abia State University Uturu in 1984. However, in 1990s crops of universities like Edo State University, Ekpoma; Delta State University, Abraka; Nnamdi Azikkwe

University, Awka and University of Uyo also set up library schools. It is imperative to mention that while other library schools focused on bachelor degree programme, that of Uyo centered on postgraduate progrmmes (Masters and PhD).

The beginning of the 21st century till date has been surrounded with proliferation of library schools in many federal, state and private universities. Few among them are those of Federal Universities of Technology Minna and Yola; University of Benin; University of Calabar; University of Ilorin; University of Lagos; Katsina State University (now Umar Musa Yaradua State University); Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijeu-Ode; Kwara State University, Malete; Babcock University, etc.

The Nigerian polytechnics and colleges of education have also been making significant impact in producing middle level manpower in librarianship. On the lead are Kaduna Polytechnic, Federal Polytechnics Nekede, Oko and Offa, Katsina Polytechnic, etc. Some colleges of education have also introduced library and information science as minor subject for National Certificate in Education. Presently, GSE 110 is a compulsory library component of General Studies Education which must be passed before graduation.

It is evident that library and information science education is gradually spreading to most of the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Also, the established library schools have succeeded in producing various categories of personnel for the various types of libraries. However, the pertinent question or issue is, "can the curricula, training technique, facilities and products of the Nigerian library schools withstand the contemporary challenges? Challenges of modern trends in LIS Education in Nigeria

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in its National Policy on Education acknowledged that "no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers"(p.27). From this statement, it can be deduced that efficient and effective library and information service in Nigeria depends to a great extent on the quality of librarians/information scientists, who are products of the library schools. In fact, the adequacy and relevance of knowledge, skills, norms, values, attitudes and approaches are critical to any profession yearning to withstand the modern challenges. To Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), "no issue in any profession is more contentious than the form of professional education and training required of its practitioners"(p.133).

The dynamism of the society has manifested to a lot of developmental changes and cutting across all sectors. The ways of doing things previously can no longer meet the modern taste, thus, change is a necessity. Specifically, the changing demands of the library and information profession dictate that preparation for this field cannot be regarded complete as professional must take the changes in the world into account and update themselves in order to perform creditably on their jobs (Gongchi, 2008).

There is a significant relationship between the libraries and library schools, whatever influence or implication on one affects the other. Consequently, whatever challenges facing Nigerian libraries would also affect the training departments or schools. In the light of fore goings, the challenges posed to library and information science education in Nigeria are hereby discussed:

(i)   Information material transformation: Right from the ancient period to date, the society has witnessed transformation in the information format. There was a time when clay tablet, stones, papyrus, parchment (animal skin), etc were the major materials for information storing and services but with change as a result of technological development, paper and movable type of printing (invented by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 A.D) came in, thus forcing the ancient system into extinction. Though, paper and printing are still relevant now however, it is evident that some information resources are no longer in printed forms but electronically. It is a challenge to library schools that focus only on the traditional method of collection development.

(ii)   Rural information service: The Nigerian populace is still predominantly rural dwellers. The information service delivery to the grass root in Nigeria is poor thus affecting life pattern of the dwellers. Librarians and particularly those in public libraries that might not have received adequate training in library school on rural information service or community service, are thus constraint.

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(iii)   Enabling environment: Environmental factors are instrumental to the growth and development of any establishment. It has been observed however, that quite a number of library schools are not provided with adequate infrastructural facilities like offices, classrooms, practical class/laboratories, teaching and learning resources, etc. This is possible because of inadequate fund allocation. It has also prevented internet connectivity in computer laboratories where available. A product of library school where all these essential facilities are not available or inadequate would be handicapped in modern information provision.

(iv)   Information and communication technology application: Most sectors of a nation have been influenced with the advent of ICT facilities. The following factors identified by Omekwu (2004) as challenges to libraries or information centres can also be influential to library schools:

(a)   Management decision to introduce computer systems,
(b)   Acquisition of IT based systems
(c)   High literacy level of Chief Executive Officer of an establishment,
(d)   Installation of a Local Area Network in an organization;
(e)   Need to access online databases like OCLC, AGRIS, etc.
(f)   Need to increase speed of service
(g)   Users' desirability for electronic service
(h)   Global trend in information environment
(i)   Information resources sharing and cooperation among external agencies
(j)   Donor-assistance on IT trainings
(k)   External donation of computer and IT systems
(l)   External loans with computer component
(m)   Professionalism's contact, cooperation and communications(pp.18-21)

A library school has the challenge of complying to ICT oriented education if the aforementioned compelling factors are on ground. In addition, it can be an added challenge if the training institutes on library and information science can take the advantages of ICT resources as highlighted by Ubogu (2006):

•   the resources will never be out on loan and will be available at any time, any place, and anywhere;
•   access is provided to more complete sets of journals than, in many instances, now exist on many library shelves;
•   technical services cost of tracking the arrival of each journal issue claiming and periodical binding will be eliminated;
•   the need for added library space may decline; and
•   costs of retrieving and shelving materials will be reduced (p.6).

(v)   Micro curriculum: Some library schools in Nigeria up till now still harbored micro curricula that are narrow in scope and which cannot provide their products with self-reliance education. Training in any field of human endeavour today that is not all embracing or multi-dimensional is not only a danger but dehumanizing. A micro curriculum in this modern time is full of challenges.
(vi)   ICT skills: It is a major issue in Nigerian library schools that quite a number of library and information science educators do not have the required knowledge in ICT for library and information service. Some of those who have knowledge in ICT cannot practically educate their students effectively. Similarly, some computer scientists employed in some library schools are also handicapped in the field of librarianship and thus ineffective in their teaching.
(vii)   Professional Association accreditation: Unlike other prominent professional bodies, there has not been a professional accreditation on the platform of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) to evaluate the programmes in the schools. Bodies such as Nigerian Bar Association, National Medical Association to mention but few, do embark on accreditation separate to that of the controlling bodies like National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education and National Commission for Colleges of Education. The absence of a specialized accreditation for the Nigerian library schools is affecting such institutions negatively.
(viii)   Problem in the enrolment of student: It is a common phenomenon in some Nigerian library schools that major bulks of their students do not intend offering library and information science. These sets of students when they could not get admission in the chosen courses are offered librarianship unintentionally. This system of

enrolment has an adverse effect on the profession, more so that such students after graduation do not portrail the profession well nor devoted to its course.

(ix)   Pre-requisite training for professionalism: Librarianship profession has being an accommodating body for different specialists to join. For instance, somebody who has first degree in a field of specialization has the privilege to enroll for Postgraduate Diploma or master degree in library and information science to become a professional. It is however observed that this privilege has implications on the profession. One, the profession cannot compete with classical professions like medical, BAR, Engineering, etc because there is standard in the training of their professionals. For example, to become a lawyer, a graduate in another field will only be enrolled into two hundred level at the university and thereafter proceed to law school. This is equally similar to medicine. Two, the marathon approach of training students at master degree level and particularly for those who are just offering the course for the first time is a matter of concern. How can a person become a professional of a recognized field within one or two years? Can the candidate obtain the required skills within the period? This is a challenge!

The Way Forward

It is essential for any training institution or profession to move along with the modern trend in order to be relevant. Library and information science education has gone a long way in Nigeria and thus should gear up towards making more impact to the life of the citizenry. Just as information has been regarded as an essential commodity in the society, so also, should the library schools that produced information professionals be acknowledged. In view of the prevailing challenges to library and information science education in Nigeria, the followings are suggested as a way forward:

It is obvious that printed information resources are still common in most libraries of the world, it is however recommended that Nigerian libraries and library schools should start to de-emphasis gradually in teachings and practice from the traditional techniques of information service to technology. This implies that there should be technological influence on all the courses in the library schools.

Since knowledge is dynamic, it is imperative for library and information science educators to go for training and re-training. The skills and knowledge acquired by them perhaps some years ago may not match the modern trends hence, constant staff development is required. The managements of institutions should as matter of fact make adequate provisions for LIS educators to pursue further courses or attend conferences/seminars locally and internationally. Specifically, LIS educators should as a matter of urgency embark on training on ICT skills acquisition so as to be competent with the contemporary techniques of information service delivery.

The curriculum of any field in this modern period needs to be all embracing or encyclopedic in scope (macro). Many institutions have emerged today in the provision of information and thus becoming a threat to librarianship. For this profession to be relevant and compete with others, it has to modify its operational system to suit the modern trends. It is quite obvious that many users now desist from patronizing the libraries and have chosen the internet as substitute. Access to the internet, suppose to be a supplement if libraries actually performed their expected roles. Ideally, the degree of information accessibility in the library (using all the retrieval devices) is better attained than in the internet where relevant and irrelevant information has been dumped. In this regard, the library schools have the major responsibility to discharge through constant review of their curricula in the following ways:

•   Incorporation of courses on rural information provision/services so that the rural majority can also be attended to;
•   Involvement of self-reliance courses with much needed practicals that can facilitate self-employment like entrepreneurship skills on publishing, information broking, consultancy service, etc;
•   Initiation of modern technology into all the courses since transformation is a necessity.

The Nigerian library schools can achieve academic excellence which can further revolutionize into social, political, economic and technological developments if adequate infrastructural facilities are provided. How can a library school function effectively where there is no computer laboratory? And where in existence, are the needed facilities available or adequate? The survival or sustainability of library schools depends on adequate provision of ICT facilities with internet connectivity. Students or products of library schools can be prone to many job prospects if the computer laboratories are made to function well. For constant functionality, a standby generator should also be

provided since the supply of power in Nigeria is still erratic. In addition, the course lecturer should always work hand in hand with the computer system officers for effective teaching and learning.

To ensure minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library Association should not rely on the accreditation exercise of the NUC, NBTE and NCCE alone. The NLA as a professional body should borrow belief from other professional bodies like the Medical, Bar, Engineering, Estate Management, Land and Quantity Survey, Pharmaceutical Associations, etc., by organizing a separate accreditation of courses in the profession. The common saying that two good heads are better than one is much relevant here and should be urgently addressed to safeguard the profession from peculiar mess. The professional body should curb the incessant establishment of library schools in Nigeria and where necessary disaccredit certain schools that are not meeting the standards. Half-baked products can create more harm than good to the profession and the society at large.

Conclusion

It is over five decades when library and information science education had been formally introduced in Nigeria to produce qualified and adequate personnel into our libraries and information centres. The absence or dearth of library school in Nigeria is a matter of the past. However, the establishment of such schools is not enough, but there is need to ensure that they withstand the modern challenges through adequate provisions (human, materials, financial, and resources for teaching and learning, etc.). The contemporary scenario predominated by information and knowledge perspectives as observed by Karisiddappa (2004) suggest the pressing need to educate and train the library and information manpower towards a sustainable professional competence.

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