Empowering Library Users Through the Five Laws of Library Science.

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Abstract

The library is instrumental to societal progress by providing reading and learning resources which enrich the user’s mental vision and dignifies his habit, character, taste, attitude and perception of life. However, it does not seem obvious to some librarians that there are certain practice principles upon which modern library operations are anchored. The paper identifies invention of writing and printing from movable type as the two major epochs that brought about the library and its subsequent development respectively. It discusses the S.R. Ranganathan’s five laws of library science as the practice principles upon which library operations can be deduced and through which the library has positively impacted on society.

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Introduction

Can we imagine the world without libraries? Could the world have attained its present level of development without library and information services? We may still ponder: can the world attain greater heights in all developmental indices without library and information services support? To show how the library has played a key role in societal progress, let us go back to history. The world without libraries actually existed. It was in the pre-literate era when writing had not been invented. During this time, knowledge was private. Knowledge only existed in the mind of the possessor and therefore not available to anyone else except there was the need for the individual possessor to share it with someone he desired. Communication was oral and therefore there was no public knowledge in the sense of having a recorded corpus of knowledge which could be accessed by anyone who desired to. A society without libraries is one where private knowledge is predominant; where knowledge is not widely shared, and where human progress is sluggish because new knowledge is seldomly created. This is typical of the pre-literate society and the ancient times.
Once man's accumulated thoughts and experiences increased beyond the capacity of his memory to retain, he started feeling the need for a permanent means of preserving them. This was later achieved through the invention of writing. Thus, the greatest breakthrough in the development of human civilization was the invention of writing as a means of communication, because, according to Musingafi and Chiwanza (2012), writing facilitated the capturing of knowledge and other forms of human narratives and business transactions. Over time, there grew accumulated records of human experience and this created the need for a means of preserving them. Thus the library originated as a result of the need to preserve the accumulated records of human thoughts and experiences. The early libraries were more of storehouses and books and records were meant to be preserved. These libraries were merely proto-libraries, largely of archival nature, established for and by the elite to serve religious, business, administrative or legal needs (Aguolu, 1989). Though the role of the early libraries was essentially preservatory, they were used by a few for research and study. The unwritten law seemed to have been ‘books are for preservation’. It is doubtful if the originators of the library as a preservatory facility for records and documents ever imagined that what they created would metamorphosed into a facilitator of human civilization.

The libraries of Ashurbanipal of Ninevah in ancient Mesopotamia, the Alexandria library by the Ptolemies, the Pergamum library by Attalus I and Eumenes II in Asia Minor, the Monastic libraries, etc. were great testimonies of the importance the elites of the time attached to the library. Though these libraries were not open to the wider society, they nevertheless played a pivotal role in the socio-economic, political and cultural development of the times.

According to Aguolu (1939), the idea of a library benefiting the masses was largely a 19th century development in the United States of America when there was a great upsurge of interest in self-education and of the desire in universal public education. In the same vein, Sayers (1957) noted that the democratic library tradition we currently enjoy had arisen in America and England only in the latter part of the 19th Century. However, the turning point in the development of libraries must be credited to the invention of printing from movable type in Germany by Johann Gutenberg in 1456, This development gave rise to multiple copies of titles and was a great boost to libraries. It banished manual production of books, and according to Eisenstein (1979), the shift from copyist's desk to printer's workshop revolutionized all forms of learning. In the fifty years between 1450 and 1500, eight million books were printed - more than all the scribes in Europe had produced in the previous thousand or so years. In the words of the Encyclopedia Americana, "the invention of printing
from movable type is the greatest single event in the history of the book". Speaking in the same vein, Francis Bacon stated that the invention of printing from movable type is one of the three inventions that have changed "the appearance and state of the world." Indeed, no invention has had such a cataclysmic effect on society except the computer and its associated technologies. It is in acknowledgement of this that Aguolu opined that the invention of printing quickened the development of libraries of all types as it led to a wide diffusion of knowledge and of books and journals. It promoted a taste for library culture, increased literacy, opened wide doors of learning, broke the monopoly of the rich and intellectual.

The library, irrespective of its time, and type, is not only concerned about the present, but also about the past and the future. The present, because it acquires materials to meet the present needs of its clients; the past because some materials that are acquired are of historical significance and can influence the present; and the future because the past and the present can be used to shape the future. Through its systematic collection, the library tells us where we are coming from, where we are and where we should be. It thus enables us to understand and appreciate our past and present and empowers us to plan for the future.

Libraries have been an instrument of socio-economic, cultural and political change. The library is a foyer of living ideas that permeates and animates all aspects of national life (Ikoku, 1971). According to Aguolu (1989), the library is a place where the dead may be said to be alive, that is, a place where the ideas, knowledge and experiences of great men and women, fully documented and preserved, continue to move the world although these people may be no more. In other words, it is a place where the knowledge seeker communes with authors - both living and dead. The library as a portent instrument of social change can be seen in communist Russia. It was said that Russia was economically rated very low in 1917 and that 70% of her citizens were non-literate. But all that changed through the instrumentality of libraries championed by Lenin and his librarian wife, Krupskaya. Together, they had admonished their country men and women thus: "We are sure that neither a single teacher nor a single school will enlighten you as much as your local library. And the most important thing, dear comrade, is that books will help you abolish the most baneful inequality, the inequality of intellect (as cited by Chandler, 1972). Power comes from the intellect and library resources nourish the intellect.

Education empowers citizens with the tools and resources to reduce inequalities of all types. No educational system can be considered adequate without an effective and efficient library and information services. Libraries are not adjunct but central to education. It is in recognition of the key role of the library at all levels of education that the National Policy on
Education (2006 as amended) and the various laws establishing all tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria provide for libraries as integral parts of these institutions. In this vein, libraries drive development. This is why in the developed, and serious developing countries, libraries and library use are well embedded in their national cultures. Libraries provide knowledge resources which enable users to be creative participants in the development drive of their nation. While school and academic libraries provide information and knowledge resources to institutions of learning in order to extend the learning process, special libraries provide information to business organizations to enable them forecast market, develop new products or adapt new technology; to research institutes to enable them synthesize new data with known facts as part of creative process; and to government agencies for the formulation of plans, policies and refinement of the decision-making process. Therefore, provision of the right information when and where needed improves the ability of an individual, a business, a government agency, or some other kind of organization to make informed decisions (Aguolu, 1989). Thus the greatest empowerment of any citizen is the empowerment of the intellect. These generate positive ideas and the world is made a better place by great ideas. Therefore, information—particularly in its hard form—is a critical resource and the library is universally acknowledged to be the purveyor of authentic information and knowledge which are essential for national development. National development does not just happen. It is a conscious effort by knowledgeable, well informed and focused citizenry. It is about the people, by the people and for the people. Therefore, for a nation to develop, it needs to provide adequate library and information infrastructure in order to build the capacity of its citizenry who will bring about development. The library plays a key role in bringing about societal progress by providing resources which enrich the user's mental vision and dignifies his habit, character, taste, attitude, conduct and perception of life. As a change agent, it serves to form the individual into a responsible citizen. A well-stocked library is an asset to the school, college, university or the locality. It is an unarguable fact that libraries play crucial role in national development by providing an indispensable ingredient—information. This is why nations are creating strategies to ensure that information and knowledge resources are used effectively, shared and made accessible in order to empower people to act as agents of their own development. Information enables people to fight poverty, deprivation and illiteracy. This is a clear testimony that underscores the role of libraries in national development (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006). The 2014 IFLA President's meeting held in Helsinki, Finland from 22-23 May 2014 was entitled: “Strong Libraries, Strong Societies: The Impact of Libraries on Society.” That the library has impacted, and will continue to impact on society despite the
seeming infinite possibilities of the information and communication technologies is not in dispute. However, the question is: from what practice principles has the library developed the capacity to impact on the society? It is in an effort to provide answer to this poser that we will now discuss the S.R. Ranganathan’s five laws of library science.

Empowering Library Users through the Five Laws of Library Science

Though these laws might seem self-evident today, they certainly were not to librarians in the early part of the 20th century. According to Garfield (1984), the five laws of library science were a first step toward putting library work on a scientific basis, providing general principles from which all library practices could be deduced. In view of the importance of these laws, Noruzi (2004) and Simpson (2008) have recommended the application of these laws to the Web and the Media respectively. Although Ranganathan later revised the laws (Dasgupta, 2007) by replacing ‘book’ with ‘document’ in the first three laws, the original form of the laws is preferred because book is a more generic term than document. The change, in the opinion of this contributor is unnecessary. So also is the gender sensitivity demonstrated in the third law.

The First Law - Books are for Use

One might be tempted to ask: 'use' for what and by who? Though the circumstances of the book in the days before the invention of printing from moveable type was different, the first law is a constant reminder that the library of today must not slide to the libraries of the pre-modern times. To get the best from the human resource, it must be fed with rich and various cultural and information contents. Herein lies the critical role of the library as a change agent. Libraries are no ends in themselves. They are instrumental to the desires of their users - the desires for academic and intellectual empowerment. The task before the librarian - be he a cataloguer; in reference, circulation, or collection development - is to ensure that the collections of the library are accessed and maximally used. The more a library is used, the more its prestige and ranking. To ensure that the collections are maximally used, libraries have devised tools and systems which will aid them in making good selection bearing in mind the present and potential requirements of their users. It is to ensure use of the library that Ratcliffe (1983) has advised that when establishing a library's priorities, financial and others, its collections must come before staffing, services and accommodation. According to him, no action in a library is truly irrevocable, except not 'to buy stock when available'. He however cautioned that this does not mean a mindless and indeterminate
proliferation of irrelevant materials. For books in the library to be used and therefore empower, they should be carefully and systematically selected for acquisition and the library should institute a policy of periodic weeding of obsolete materials. There is nothing like a user coming to a library and finding the material he or she needs or its alternative.

In order to increase use of the library, not only does the library ensure that the collection is as complete as possible and current, efforts are also made to ensure that the building is functional and adequate both for the normal library user and the physically and visually challenged ones. Other access related activities aimed at increasing patronage include user education, loan policies, location, days of operation, reference service, current awareness services and exhibition. All these measures are meant to ensure that books in the library are not shut away from users. The first law emphasizes access and use. Without physical or electronic access to library resources they cannot be used.

**The second Law - Every Reader his Book**

Implicit in the second law is that the library is user-centric. Every activity in the library is aimed at satisfying and empowering the user. To accomplish this, the library institutes user studies in order to know the users well enough so as to acquire the right books for them. It is also to provide 'every reader his book' that libraries keep information profiles of their clients. The collections of the library must be as diverse as its users. It is for this reason that Rubin (2004) has advised that collections should meet the special interest of the community, and that, libraries should promote and advertise their services extensively to attract a wide range of users. The library possesses the know-how for selecting and acquiring for present and future generations the best information resources available from the library staff’s wide knowledge of the variety, range and usefulness of such information resources. The library as a social service institution possesses a commitment to service which involves a sensitivity to the needs and uses of information and a desire to match these needs. To this end, the expectations of the library users serve as a guideline for the integrated library development, planning of library services, and enrichment of existing collection (Kulkarni and Deshpande (2012). Efforts are also made to ensure that the subject(s), language(s) and style of exposition of books to be selected correlate with the requirements of the users. The analytic entries for some books in the catalogue are meant to bring out the hidden contents in such books to the users. This is for books that are composite in nature. As it is always the case, no library, no matter how well endowed it appears to be, has all the materials it needs. Therefore, to satisfy this second law, libraries go into one form of cooperation or the other in
an attempt to fill whatever resource gap that exists. Thus through interlibrary loan, cooperative acquisition, library networking, library consortia, etc., libraries have tried to provide ‘every reader his book.’ It is in line with this that Line (1996) refers to librarianship in the new economic era as "managing information resources for the people."

**The Third Law - Every Book its Reader**

Here, the library upholds the principle of intellectual freedom, ensures that information and knowledge resources are not only accessible but also represent all shades of opinion. Through user studies, the library tries to identify those readers that a particular book will serve or empower. This law implies that the acquisition librarian must ensure that each item brought into the library has an individual or individuals who would find that item useful. Money invested on any book without readers is money wasted. Therefore, the interest or information needs of readers should always guide the library in the selection and acquisition of library materials. To facilitate access to books that meet users' needs, the library has by classified arrangement of books, arranged books subject-wise in a filiatory sequence. Furthermore, the provision of analytical entries in a catalogue increases the chances of composite books being accessed by their readers. Readers advisory service, shelf guide and library guide are meant to achieve ‘every book its reader.’ In selecting books for acquisition, the librarian should not allow his ideological or religious belief to influence his decision. Otherwise, he would be contravening the third law of library service thereby breaching intellectual freedom.

**The Fourth Law - Save the Time of the Reader**

This emphasizes efficiency in service delivery. To achieve this, the library must have a workforce that is well motivated and professionally competent. Library rules and processes should not create barriers to access to use of materials. A user who comes to the library has a gap in his knowledge of the world around him and would want this to be filled as soon as possible. The library collections are so well organized as to save the time of the user. The ease with which a user retrieves a document or obtains the information he needs might determine whether or not he would make a repeat visit to the library. In order to save the time of the reader, the library has instituted services such as user education, readers' advisory service as well as library and shelf guides. Furthermore, modern libraries are integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) into all library operations not only to provide the user access to a wide range of materials but also to save his time. Furthermore,
the librarian needs to possess certain attributes most important of which are mental agility and ability to recall from memory.

**The Fifty Law - Library is a Growing Organism**

This is about change and flexibility. The library must be dynamic in order to cope with the flood of information being created. It is about how the library responds to both the internal and external changes. In other words, libraries must be able to adapt their services, buildings, collections to the changing times and needs. To achieve this, the librarian is enjoined to constantly update his/her professional knowledge and skills. A library established today is not expected to remain the same forever. The library is expected to anticipate increase in the number of users and corresponding increases in the number of staff and library space. In view of the exponential growth in literature, the collection is expected to reflect this increase in knowledge. Some library buildings are designed in anticipation of these growths. Perhaps the most important aspect of the library as a growing organism is that library materials are consumables. This is why "library stock-building is a continuous addition of new titles of books, new editions of available titles and subsequent issues of periodicals" (Opara, 2008). It is also in line with the library as a growing organism that the IFLA/UNESCO Guideline for public library service (Gill et al, 2001) provided that:

- The public library must have adequate resources not just when it is established but also on a continuing basis to enable it to sustain and develop services that meet the needs of the local community. This means it should provide materials in all formats, updated regularly to meet the changing needs of groups and individuals, including newly published and replacement materials.

In view of the changing landscape of the library profession brought about by information and communication technology, the library as a growing organism cannot be more evident than now. These laws are meant to help the librarian to stay focused on the customer when thinking about how to deliver services and materials.

From the foregoing, it can see that the library is the social service institution through which the records of man's thoughts and ideas and the expression of his creative imagination are made freely and equitably available to all; whether they are in written, electronic or audio-visual form. The role of libraries in creating literate environment is pivotal and they do this by providing relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and for all library levels. Libraries provide information and knowledge services that break social, political and economic barriers as well as making special effort to extend their benefits to the
disadvantaged members of the society. Through their services, libraries provide opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, critical thinking, creative imagination, individual and group research and ultimately, empowerment in an increasing complex world (Krolak, 2005). According to UNESCO,

the goal of education for all also involves the development of literate societies in the developing world, and cannot be attained solely by providing quality learning materials to schools. If people are to stay literate, they must have access to a wide variety of written materials and continue the habit of reading in their adult lives (UNESCO n.d.).

Here, school and public libraries are called to duty. While school libraries are designed to support basic education, the public libraries promote literacy and lifelong learning. Libraries were expected to play crucial role in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the just formulated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is no doubt that a well supported library system or network of any nation is capable of playing a facilitating role in the attainment of the Development Goals. However, libraries of all types in Nigeria are generally incapacitated to play the role expected of them.

Challenges to the Ideals of the Five Laws of Library Science

The attitude of Nigerians and governments at various levels in Nigeria to libraries is not salutary. Unfortunately, the impact of libraries on society is not as immediate and dramatic as other social service institutions like hospitals. Other than university libraries, attention to the other types of libraries generally leaves much to be desired. Opara (2010) had noted that among the social service institutions in Nigeria, the library appears to be the least understood by the people for whom it is established and perhaps, the least provided for in terms of resources. In this circumstance, libraries in Nigeria cannot meet the challenges of the digital era. In specific terms, the following are some of the challenges incapacitating libraries in Nigeria from implementing the ideals of S.R. Ranganathan’s five laws of library science.

Inadequate Funding

The low priority rating of library and information services in Nigeria is reflected most in poor resource allocation. This has been acknowledged in the literature by Lawal (2002), Maidebiro (2009); and Ajidahum (2004). That academic libraries are fairing better is understandable. They are the hearts, or central organs, of their parent institutions and are statutorily required to provide materials in support of teaching, learning and research. According to the University Grants Committee (1921):
The character and efficiency of a university may be gauged by its treatment of its central organ - the library. We regard the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary and most vital need in the equipment of university. An adequate library is not only the basis of all teaching and study; it is the essential condition of research, without which additions cannot be made to the sum of human knowledge.

The resource gap between academic libraries in Nigeria and other countries is so wide that efforts need to be stepped up to bridge the gap. As Opara (2010) has noted, but for the efforts of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the present level of funding of Nigerian university libraries through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) could not have been achieved. School, public and some special libraries are the most neglected and they cannot be expected to play their roles effectively. This is why Opara observed that financial support to the library and information science sector is a measure of the priority rating of the LIS profession in Nigeria and indeed elsewhere.

**Library and Information Science Education**

The erroneous perception that library and information science (LIS) programme is a cheap discipline has more or less reduced it to a 'dumping' ground for persons who couldn't be accepted in other disciplines. This partly explains why some LIS students do not pursue the programme with commitment and enthusiasm. Such students upon graduation are unlikely to demonstrate commitment to service at the place of work.

There is a disturbing proliferation of LIS schools in Nigeria. Many of these schools are ill-equipped and grossly under-staffed. The effect of these on their products is better imagined. According to the National Universities Commission (2014) in the Draft Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for Undergraduate Programmes in Nigerian Universities for LIS 2014, the availability of resources is sine-qua-non for effective and efficient implementation of programme; therefore, resources must be adequate and be provided as required. Curiously, some ill-equipped and under-staffed LIS schools have been known to have their programmes accredited!

Today's library needs librarians who can rise to the challenge of merging the traditional print-based library services with those of a virtual nature. Therefore, the professional education of future librarians ought to equip them with the basic knowledge and skills necessary for effective and efficient service performance on the job after qualification.
Inadequate Librarians on the Job

A good number of libraries in Nigeria are inadequately staffed. Only few school libraries enjoy the benefit of professional direction. The public libraries have the highest library staff turnover because of poor conditions of service. Librarian: student ratio in most of the academic libraries is very high. This cannot make for effective service delivery to the clients. Library orientation has become history in some of these libraries because of the explosion in students intakes.

Absence of Library Standards

Standards are crucial in any professional practice in that they represent quality and excellence. In the developed countries, libraries of all types have their respective standards which incorporate its practices. The last school library standard in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Education was published in 1990. As obsolete as it has become, a survey is currently on to determine the level of its application to secondary schools libraries in Imo Slate. Without pre-empting the outcome of this survey, a cursory visit to most of our primary and secondary schools would reveal that they do not have libraries let alone meeting the standards nor the LRCN school library standards of 2013. We are aware that the CULNU is making efforts to formulate standards for university libraries. The Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) has also come up with draft standards for the academic library and other libraries. These efforts should be encouraged so that parameters would be provided with which to measure the performance of these libraries.

Inadequate Library Advocacy and Lobbying

Library advocacy and lobbying are potent instruments required to bring about changes in fortunes of libraries in Nigeria. Lobbying in relation to the library is an attempt to influence those who are in positions to make decisions in favour of the library. The Librarian (Registration, etc.) Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should formulate a viable library advocacy and lobbying programme.

Absence of National Commission for Library and Information Science

This is perhaps the greatest problem inhibiting the growth and development of the library and information science sector in Nigeria. The Nigerian Library Association has for years clamoured to no avail for the establishment of this body. In the absence of this commission, there is no organ of government to coordinate and promote library and
information science development in Nigeria. The LRCN is statutorily responsible for the regulation of the education and practice of librarianship.

**Digital Divide**

There is a yearning digital divide between libraries in Nigeria and the developed countries including some developing countries. Most of the libraries in Nigeria are print-based. This means limited, and most times lack of access to abundant e-resources. Today’s library is ICT-driven and inadequate financial support to our libraries means that this facility will remain a luxury good for a long time to come and to that extent, our libraries would be incapacitated in empowering the citizenry.

**Conclusion**

Besides providing information and knowledge resources to institutions of learning to extend the learning process, libraries provide information to other sectors of the society and in so doing proves itself as the engine of national growth and development. In the words of Wilmot (1982): "In nations where intellectuals and intellectual production are respected, libraries will: be powerful tools of national development; enable the nation to attain its historic destiny; be inexhaustible fountain of national consciousness.” Nigeria is not yet such a country and as such libraries’ effectiveness in Nigeria will continue to be hampered.

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