

ATTITUDE OF LIBRARIANS TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN NIGERIA: NIGER STATE IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper highlighted the concepts of library and information science, information professionals, librarian, characteristics of librarianship as a profession. Addressed by this paper is the attitude of librarians towards LIS professional issues surrounding librarianship in Nigeria and Niger State in particular and include: non-interest in the scholarly contribution to knowledge, continuing professional development, non-identification/exposure as professionals, emphasis on administrative duties as opposed to professional duties, irregular/non-payment of annual membership dues. For each of these attitudes exhibited by librarians, the paper was able to enumerate the corresponding ideal situation. Factors affecting the attitude of librarians in participating in LIS professional issues were enumerated and include; attitude of the state chapter executive council members towards organizing meeting/publicity, employers' attitude towards LIS matters and funding issues. Conclusion was that the implication of these attitudes would include: non-updateness on LIS matters on the part of librarians, professional development/promotion prospect will negatively be affected; librarians may be denied voting right or be voted for; there would be inaccurate statistics/data of librarians in the state. The paper recommended that there should be wider publicity through modern media; employers' recognition to librarianship in terms of continuing professional development. Other recommendations include: enforcement of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigerian(LRCN) law on employment, professional practice and promotion; organizing regular workshops by executive council of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Niger State Chapter.

Keywords: Attitudes, Implication, Librarians, Niger State, Nigeria, Nigerian Library Association, Professional Issues,

Introduction

Librarianship has passed through various ages (pre-industrial, industrial and information). The overall mission is to make information in whatever format accessible to mankind for optimum utilization to satisfy their information needs. Today we have libraries of different kinds, training institutions offering LIS programmes as well as bodies in-charge of regulating the LIS professional practices/activities within LIS professional fields (library science, publishing, information science, library administration and management, archives and records management, etc.).According to Aina (2004), there exists different information professionals and these professionals can be categorized as librarians, archivists, record managers, information workers, information scientists, database managers, educators, etc. Among these information professionals there exist two groups i.e. practitioners and educators. The former work in libraries of any type while the latter teach/lecture in institution/department of LIS. Like any other profession, librarianship has professional attributes/characteristics which according to Nwalo (2000: 80-82) include: -

- a. Librarianship contains theories and principles,
- b. Teaching is done through formal education in universities, while the basic qualification is Bachelor degree in librarianship,
- c. Interest of users is considered first,
- d. Universe of knowledge communicated through books or non-book materials acquired and managed by librarians,
- e. Practical attachment/SIWES,
- f. Librarianship in Nigeria is guided by decree number 12 of 1995 (LRCN),
- g. Librarianship in Nigeria has a professional association at National level (NLA),
- h. The NLA has a professional publication called Nigerian libraries,
- i. Usefulness to society (because information is necessary ingredient in the overall development of society).

Librarian is a professional that have undergone formal training programme in an approved institution leading to award of bachelor degree or higher degree in librarianship (library science, library and information science, archives and record management, etc).he or she may be the head of library, head of a section/unit of a library, head of department of library and information science or an entrepreneur librarian as an information broker, system analyst, consultant, e.t.c. Regardless of any field of specialization, the LIS professionals apart from discharging their primary duties are expected to pass through certain professional issues within the LIS profession. This is crucial because of the modern trends in the profession. However, personal observation have shown that some LIS professionals particularly librarians (practitioners and educators) do not take part in professional activities/issues in Nigeria and Niger State in particular. The following are some of the professional issues for nothing:

Scholarly Contribution to Knowledge

Librarians are the key agents of information dissemination and one means of disseminating professional ideas are reputable journals. However practical experience have shown that majority of librarians working in primary and post – primary schools do not publish. Even those working in academic libraries do not care to make scholarly contribution to knowledge. However Saka (2014) posits that one of the contributions of NLA is to make scholarly contribution to knowledge through such publications as “Nigerian Libraries”, NLA state chapter journals, library schools' journals and related professional journals. Librarians are supposed to conduct researches on national perspectives to enhance nation building. The findings from various researches are supposed to be presented at seminars, conferences or workshops and published in reputable journals (Dauda, 2011).

Professionalization/Certification of Librarians

With the promulgation of decree number 12 of 1995, the LRCN is charged with the responsibilities of determining who is a librarian, knowledge and skills required to be a librarian and accredit LIS programmes. Librarians after the possession of at least bachelor degree in librarianship and undergone one year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme are required to apply for certification with LRCN. Majority of librarians, more especially those working in establishments outside libraries and those teaching in primary and secondary schools do not care to apply for certification with LRCN. As at 2013 when the fourth batch of certified librarians were inducted, there are 3,264 librarians in Nigeria. The writer of this paper carefully went through the LRCN 2013 certified librarians' document and discovered that out of a total of 3,264 certified librarians in Nigeria, 84 were librarians in Niger State working with

both government and private organizations. See LRCN 2013 – List of certified librarians or google: <http://www.lrcn.org.ng> – certified librarians. The writer of this paper has appealed to these categories of librarians in Niger State on the need for them to be chartered but the appeal felt in deaf ears. It should be noted however, that un-certified librarians are not to be employed, promoted or cannot even practice in the nearest future when there is enforcement.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

This is also known as staff training, staff development, professional development, continuing education and capacity building. All these concepts tends to explain the acquisition of skills and intellectual development of workers to enable them function well in their various organizations. For a worker to be up to date, experienced, skillful and competent in the discharge his/her duty(ies), it is expected he/she should undergo formal education in a recognized and accredited institution that offers LIS Programme; acquire skills in the course of working and be attending conferences, seminars and workshops on regular basis (Adigun Ochogwu, 2016). According to Ochogwu (2016) two forms of continuing education includes: attending an institution to obtain better certificate to enhance competency and non-formal type which has to do with attending conferences, workshops to update knowledge in one's field of specialization/practice. The purpose of these training programmes is to make improvement in the discharge of duties. Libraries worldwide are undergoing changes which has equally affected the mode of operations in libraries (Aba & Idoko, 2016).

It is dis-hearting that majority of librarians in Niger State are not attending annual conferences, and workshops. Even though many parent organizations are not sponsoring librarians to conferences as expected, they should find means of updating their knowledge and skills. It has been observed by the writer of this paper that in the year 2009, the national conference of the NLA which took place at Ibadan, only very few librarians (about four librarians) from Niger State attended. This situation happen in other annual conferences of NLA. Apart from pursuing higher degree programmes in LIS, attending conferences and workshops; mentoring and publication; librarians should undergo on-the-job training. It is necessary that management of organizations encourage librarians to develop themselves through sponsorship to acquire skills from the training so that they can in turn apply the skills acquired in the discharge of their professional assignment (Saka, Oyedum & Song, 2016).

The 21st century has witnessed remarkable development in the LIS education sub-sector in Nigeria in particular and this includes; establishment of more library schools in specialized universities and polytechnics, continuing professional development; increase in fields of specialization, etc. However, the sere mark able development were beset by a number of factors which include: indifference attitude of LIS educators towards continuing professional development, low level of skills acquired were among others (Saka, 2005). To add to this indifference attitude of librarians especially the LIS educators in Niger state is the fact that the NALISE conferences that were held between 2009 and 2015, there were very few delegates in 2009 (Saka, 2015). It is dis-hearting that at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, there were two (2) delegates; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 2011 there were four (4) delegates, Abia State University, Uturu in 2014 there were three (3) delegates and at University of Uyo in 2015 there were two (2) delegates and between 9th and 13th May 2016, the NALISE conference took place at the University of Ibadan and five (5) delegates from Niger State (FUT Minna library school) attended the conference.

The point of argument here is that there are about 13 institutions of higher learning in Niger State and each institution has academic library where the librarians teach "Use of Library" as a course. Librarians from all these academic libraries are expected to attend NALISE conference and other sectional conferences in NLA on yearly basis.

To buttress further, there are reasonable number of librarians with bachelor degree working in various establishments in Niger State who do not care to develop themselves by way of acquiring higher degree as well as attending professional conferences, workshops or short training courses. It is evident that the possession of higher degrees; attending conferences, workshops and short training courses have positive impact on job performances of workers (Shehu, Igunnu & Maina, 2015).

Another very important aspect of CPD for librarians is the "mentoring" which has neither being neglected or used by the librarians. Mentoring is one form of CPD whereby the more experienced individual (mentor) and less experienced individual (mentee) establish mutual relationship for the purpose of professional or academic development of mentee so as to improve on his/her performance and productivity (Ozioko, Echezona and Osadebe, 2012). It is expected that the senior or experienced colleague (mentor) coach, serve as role model, direct, pass on the skills, encourage to participate in professional association issues, sponsor to conference or workshop, support for publication; provision for on-the-job training, etc. to the junior colleague (mentee) for the enhancement of efficient performance in an organization. Mentoring of this nature does not exist among librarians in Niger State chapter of NLA due to what Ozioko, Echezona and Osadebe (2012) reported as: distance between mentors and mentees; inadequate facilities for mentoring, lack of awareness on the need for mentoring, relationship between mentor and mentee, etc.

Identification/Exposure of Librarians as LIS Professionals

Because of the fact that some librarians are teaching in primary and post-primary schools; working as administrators in various ministries, boards and parastatals; as bankers and in World Bank Projects, it is very difficult to identify them. Some of the librarians neither want to be addressed as librarians nor practice the profession. This is evident in the various NLA chapter meetings, list of certified librarians (2013) and other professional activities. The identified librarians in Niger State include those working with trade unions, World Bank Projects, boards/parastatals, local government secretariats, civil and para-military forces, etc.

In order to locate, identify and determine the number of librarians in Niger State, Garba and Saka in 2009 executed a project on the compilation of the "directory of librarians in Niger State". Bio-data forms were distributed to various/establishments within the three senatorial zones in the state. Unfortunately, apart from the difficulty in locating and accessing the librarians due to the fact that most of them were serving in the remote areas (local governments, districts, wards and villages); majority of the bio-data forms were neither filled nor returned. At the end of the project, only ninety-six (96) librarians were identified and serving in Federal, State and Local Government establishments. There was also challenge in locating librarians that are serving in private organizations in the state (Garba & Saka, 2009).

Administrative Duties Versus Professional Duties

Even when librarians are employed in establishment with libraries, most of them prefer

working in the administrative units to library unit. This is because of the monetary benefits attached. Most librarians working in the parastatals/boards are more of administrators than practitioners. In Niger State, we have librarians that are principals, trade union leader, supervisors/directors in World Bank Projects, etc

Irregularity and Non-Payment of Annual Membership Dues

The identified librarians practicing in libraries as well as those teaching in library schools in the state are not paying their annual dues regularly. A good number of librarians in the state are defaulters in this regard. For the NLA state chapter to effectively function, it needs money and this is the main source of income generation

Factors Affecting the Attitude of Librarians in Participating in Professional Issues

1. **Attitude of NLA EXCOs:** EXCOs in Niger State do not call for meetings regularly and when meetings are called they are usually on short notices. On the other way round, short notices are not of wider publicity. This is a factor that is contributing to librarians not attending NLA meetings, or workshops.
2. **Attitude of employers:** Some employers do not accord recognition to librarianship in terms of library practice, accommodation, library education, sponsoring staff to conferences and certification of librarians. This usually made librarians to develop negative attitude towards professional issues as they become discouraged.
3. **Lack of money/funding:** Even when librarians have interest in attending NLA meetings, conferences, workshops or to further their postgraduate programme, adequate funding is usually a inhibiting factor and as such they become discouraged in LIS professional issues.

Conclusion

The implication of this indifference (attitude) among librarians on LIS profession in Niger State in particular and Nigeria at large include the followings:

1. On the continuing professional development, librarians who do not care to develop him/herself will be left behind/left out of the current trends of librarianship on global basis. This may not only affect the level of productivity in organization but also affect their professional development and promotion prospects to the next rank especially in academic and research institutes libraries;
2. On the certification of librarians, professionals who are not certified by the LRCN may end up not been employed, promoted or denied certain benefits or privileges in LIS sector or political appointment.
3. Irregularity in the payment of annual membership due can lead to deny of NLA membership on one hand and not getting the opportunity to vote or contest for post at state or national level of the NLA
4. There will be inaccurate statistics/data of librarians in Niger State if librarians fail to attend meetings/, conferences/workshops at state and national level.

Recommendations

From the discussion on the attitude of librarians towards professional issues in Niger State with their implications, there is the need for the executive council of the state chapter of NLA to assess these areas and map out corrective measures and implementations as well. However, the following possible suggestions and practical recommendations if implemented will help improve the NLA in Niger State chapter

1. There should be positive change of attitude on the part of NLA EXCO and the librarians in all matters affecting LIS professions in Niger State and Nigeria. These should include the followings;
2. The EXCO of NLA in Niger state should make wider publicity inviting all members/librarians to meetings and/or conferences, workshops or any professional gathering This can be channel through radio and television announcement, e-mails, telephone/GSM calls and text messages. This should be at least three week notice.
3. Employers should accord regards to librarianship in the areas of library practice, provision for separate accommodation for organization's library, sponsoring librarians to meetings, conferences and workshops. Holders of bachelor degree in librarianship be encouraged to possess higher degrees through scholarship, fellowship or grants.
4. The LRCN being a regulatory body should enforce the law on employment, professional practice and promotion so that only certified librarians be offered employment, allow to practice and/or be promoted. In order to achieve this step, list of certified librarians be sent to various organizations, institutions, ministries and parastatals. This is to complement the online submission. Employers can login to the LRCN website to determine their employees' certification, thus, [http://www.lrcn.org.ng-certified librarians](http://www.lrcn.org.ng-certified-librarians)
5. Annual membership due (registration fee)be made compulsory for all librarians and three years payment receipts should be used as one of the requirements for promotion to next rank.
6. The EXCO of NLA in Niger State should organized regular zonal workshop on "research, scholarly writing and publication" so that librarians can acquire practical training skills on how to conduct researches, write research report and publish their research findings in reputable LIS journals. Research report cannot only be disseminated through seminars, conferences or workshops but can also be published in reputable LIS professional journals or in journals of related fields.
7. A project on compilation of the list of all librarians in the Niger State should be re-visited and carried out by the LIS professionals. This should be through various federal establishments, state ministries, parastatals, boards, agencies, local government areas as well as all private organizations.

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