

Contending Issues in the Development of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Department of Library Information Technology, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State

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Abstract

This paper highlights the contending issues in the development of library and Information Science education in Nigeria and outlines the way forward to run library schools for rendering optimal services to information seekers in the society. The paper concludes that library educators should endeavour to be ICT compliant, especially to be in better position to teach the students modern techniques of information searching and retrieval using the fast developing ICT facilities available today.

Keywords: Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria, Contending Issues in the Development LIS, Education in Nigerians

Introduction

The available literature in librarianship has given different meanings and interpretations of Library and Information Science. To further explore this issue this paper gives brief definitions and explanations of "Science", "Library" and "Information". Science, according to Longman

Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) is knowledge about the world, especially based on examination and testing, and on facts that can be proved. This definition shows that science is a focused study of a subject. That is, an in-depth detailed study of a subject. A library, on the other hand, is a collection of information resources and services organized for use and maintained by a political body, institution or private individual. These information resources and services are used by people who cannot afford to purchase extensive collections themselves but they have the need for relevant information to satisfy their information needs. Similarly, information could be defined as that which is transmitted in the process of communication. That is, a process of conveying a message from the source through a medium to the receiver.

Having highlighted the definitions of science, library and information, one can therefore say that Library and Information Science, as a discipline, is the study of an in-depth nature for conveying messages/information from one individual (the source) to another (the receiver). To achieve this in-depth study of Library and Information Science, the emphasis of Library Schools in the education or teaching of the science of gathering, processing, classification, storage, manipulation, retrieval and dissemination of information in an information centre is very necessary. Basically, Library and Information Science as an interdisciplinary field is primarily concerned with the analysis, collection, classification, manipulation, retrieval and dissemination of information. Information Scientists within the field study the application and usage of knowledge in organizations, as well as the interaction between people, organizations and any existing information systems, with the aim of creating or introducing, replacing, improving or understanding information systems.

Historical Development of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria

Library in Nigeria started as a sort of public library, and existed in various parts of the country. At the beginning of the 19th century, a group of expatriate civil servants formed the "Lagos Book Club" which was a private subscription library. It was largely dominated by Europeans since it was

located within the Government house, and this made it inaccessible to most Nigerians. During the Second World War, the need to keep the colonial people of Nigeria informed about the war led to the setting up of more reading rooms. It also set in motion processes that led to the establishment of Committees on Education in the colonies. The report "Mass Education in African Society" published in 1944 touched on the issue of public library development, but nothing concrete was done about it. Then came the British Council Libraries founded to disseminate British Culture in art, intellect, letters, science, inventions, government and education. The British Council Libraries were established in Lagos, Enugu, Ibadan, Kano and Port Harcourt (Department of Library Science monograph, A.B.U.Zaria, 1986).

As earlier mentioned, the Second World War really marked a notable change in the area of public library development in Nigeria. In 1939 for example, the Carnegie Corporation appointed Hans Vischer (a joint secretary of the advisory Committee on Education in the colonies) and Margaret Wrong (who was secretary of the International Committee on Christian Library for Africa). These two people were appointed to study and report on the expansion of libraries in British West Africa (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1995). One of the most important results of the 1939 study was that, for the first time, the colonial government began to take an interest in libraries and set up a "Standing Committee to advise government on the provision of libraries."

However, the establishment of the foreign based libraries in Nigeria called for the need for training the manpower to man the libraries. Therefore, the start of library education and training of library personnel in Nigeria is traceable to the formation and activities of West African Library Association (WALA) in September, 1954 in Lagos. The formation of WALA itself was initiated by the UNESCO Seminar on the development of public libraries in Africa, held at Ibadan University College in 1953. It brought together librarians from all over Africa to discuss problems of public library development in Africa. One of the recommendations of the seminar was that some library schools of high calibre be established in Africa (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1995).

In 1960, according to Ojo-Igbinoba (1995), the activities of WALA in respect of library education led to the establishment of the Ibadan Institute of Librarianship, now Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies. Apart from Ibadan, other Library Schools such as Department of Library and Information Science A.B.U. Zaria was established in 1968, while Bayero University, Kano established her Library School in 1977. Some other universities that also established library schools include University of Maiduguri in 1978, Imo State College of Technology, Owerri in 1970, University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1986, Imo State University, Okigwe in 1990, Delta State University, Abraka in 1991, Edo State University, Ekpoma in 1991, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in 1991, Abia State University, Uturu in 1991, Federal University of Technology, Minna in 2001 and University of Ilorin in 2006, to mention but a few.

The establishment of these Library Schools in Nigeria helped to solve the problem of inadequate manpower to man the numerous existing libraries. However, there is no doubt that most of these library schools exist with some contending issues that hinder their level of performance, especially as regards proper education of the library science students in their parent institutions. Some of these contending issues bother on location and nomenclature of the Library Schools, inadequate ICT facilities for instruction and training of students, frequent changes of the curriculum, poor ICT compliance among lecturers, wrong perception of ICT as a parallel focus to Library Science instead of a tool in Library Schools and students' preference of ICT to Library and Information Science programme.

For a good discussion of these contending issues, the Department of Library and Information Technology (L.I.T.) Library School established in Federal University of Technology (F.U.T.), Minna serves a good case study.

Department of Library and Information Technology (L.I.T.), F.U.T. Minna vis-à-vis Contending Issues in Library Science Education in Nigeria

The Department of Library and Information Technology, F.U.T. Minna was established in 2001/2002 academic session in order to address

the need for a Library School in North-Central Zone of Nigeria. Being a Library School established in a technology oriented university, the first contending issue was the placement/location of the department in a faculty. First and foremost, L.I.T. Department was placed under the School of Science and Science Education (SSSE) F.U.T. Minna where it got its first accreditation in 2007. By 2010 L.I.T. Department was moved to School of Information and Communication Technology (S.I.C.T.) of the university and by 2012 the department was moved back to SSSE. Towards the end of 2012 the SSSE was split into two schools namely: School of Natural and Applied Sciences (SNAS) and School of Science and Technology Education (SSTE). With this development, L.I.T. Department was moved to STE where it is presently located.

Location problem of L.I.T. Department is not peculiar to F.U.T. Minna Library School. The location problem of Library and Information Science Departments has also been observed in other universities in Nigeria. Library Schools in Nigeria are usually located in Faculty/School of Education, except in a few cases where they are located in the Faculty of Social Sciences and /or Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences as in the case of University of Ilorin. Most library teaching staff in Nigeria are never sure of the location of their departments. This is purely the decision of the universities where the Library Schools are established unlike other Departments such as Departments of Physics, Biology and Chemistry that are permanently located in Faculty/School of Natural and Applied Sciences in most universities. This problem no doubt negatively affects the performance and output of the lecturers and students of Library Schools in Nigeria.

Another contending issue observed in F.U.T. Minna Library School is the issue of nomenclature. L.I.T. Department was established as the Department of Library and Information Technology. After about one year an argument came up among the university community that the word "AND" in the name L.I.T Department shows that L.I.T. is running two parallel programmes: Library Studies AND Information Technology studies. After a prolonged argument, L.I.T. Department, F.U.T., Minna through the intervention of NUC, is now called Department of Library Information Technology, F.U.T., Minna. No doubt, similar experiences abound in some of the other Library Schools in Nigeria, and this certainly does not help the schools to grow. Burnet (2013) discussed extensively on almost all issues

that affect nomenclature and location of LIS programme in tertiary institutions within and outside Nigeria.

Inadequate provision of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities to instruct the students is another contending issue observed in the Library School of F.U.T. Minna. ICT facilities are known to enhance teaching and learning activities in tertiary institutions. In L.I.T. Department, provision of ICT facilities such as computers, and Internet access/services are inadequate for teaching and student training exercises. Every discipline has incorporated ICT to enhance its services, and ICT of today keeps on advancing in nature. For instance, some years ago what was in existence was Windows 7 but today people can use Windows 8 and even higher versions. ICT facilities are highly appreciated in the society because they facilitate information based services and enhance peoples' efforts towards developments. Therefore, librarians striving to incorporate ICT facilities as tools for delivering optimal services to information seekers should be encouraged. ICTS are the electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information which have become fundamental to almost all library operations in the information age (Anyakoha, 2005). It is pertinent to add that library patrons of this information age prefer electronic resources like e-journals, e-books, e-newspapers, e-theses, e-dissertations and internet to the traditional resources. The modern librarian or digital librarian sees ICTs as a significant development that provides tools for managing the avalanche of information generated by the modern society. (Anaehobi, 2007).

Furthermore, frequent changes of the curriculum of Library and Information Science is another contending issue observed in most Library Schools in Nigeria. This is not surprising because as long as Library and Information Science Departments are not permanently placed in a faculty by parent institutions where the programme is run, rather it is moved from one faculty to another, the curriculum would be changing and this will always negatively affect the students' academic performances. For instance, in the Library School of F.U.T. Minna, the curriculum kept on changing as it was moved between two Schools. When L.I.T. Department was in SSSE the curriculum was different from when it was moved to S.I.C.T. where some courses such as "Introduction to Information Theories

and Applications- IMT111, Basic Information Technology tools-IMT11, Vectors, Geometry and Dynamics- MAT 112, etc., needed to be introduced to students of L.I.T. (Departmental Students Handbook, 2001-2006). Recently, the curriculum of L.I.T. Department has again been slightly changed with the present re-location of the Department in STE. These changes certainly do not only affect the students' academic performances but also the academic effectiveness of the lecturers in the Department. Research conducted by Mohammed (2013) revealed a common denominator at the LIS undergraduate programmes – core and cognate courses such as knowledge Organization; information retrieval; research methodology; practical attachment (IT); and some electives which must be offered and passed at different semesters and academic sessions. It should be added that Librarianship has attained all the attributes of a profession, contacts, well-structured formal education programmes and professional ethics, (Nwosu & Eyisi, 2012)

Another contending issue observed in F.U.T. Minna Library School is poor ICT compliance among the lecturers. Most of the lecturers in L.I.T. Department specialized in conventional Library Science programme in their first, second and third degrees while some read a different discipline in their first degree, then Library Science in the second and third degrees. In either of the cases, the level of ICT knowledge acquired was not adequate for ICT compliance and this is posing a lot of challenges to the lecturers. Therefore, every Library and Information Science lecturer in most Library Schools in order to fit into the required ICT trend of today needs to make some extra efforts so as not to be left behind. This is very necessary particularly for the teaching staff of the Library School of F.U.T. Minna especially as L.I.T. Department is in a technology-oriented university where use of modern ICT facilities and ICT compliance are highly sine qua non. Burnet (2013) supported this point of view.

Peoples' wrong perception of ICT involvement in L.I.T. Department as a parallel option (instead of a tool) in relation to the library programme and preference of ICT to Library and Information Science programme is another contending issue in Library School of F.U.T. Minna. In F.U.T. Minna most members of the university community prefer that the word "Library" is deleted from the name of the department to leave the

name as "Department of Information Technology" instead of "Department of Library and Information Technology." Most staff of F.U.T., Minna also believe that knowledge of Information Technology (IT) applications is the most important area to be imparted to students instead of teaching them library science, because to them there is nothing new to be learnt about libraries. Unfortunately, these people forgot that IT is merely a tool employed by individual Departments to render services in their respective areas of specialization and so, cannot stand alone as a degree awarding discipline. In fact, the relevance of ICT in a given discipline must be measured in its efficacy to solve specific problems in that discipline.

The Way Forward

Library and Information Science course is a service oriented discipline and for its impact to be felt in the society, library professionals need to improve their computer literacy level. ICT, as earlier mentioned, is fast advancing and people are appreciating its impact in their daily activities. Library and Information Science professionals cannot ignore the role of ICT in enhancing the library services rendered to information seekers in the society. Though the location or placement of Library and Information Science Departments in their parent institutions is necessary this is not really the problem, rather, the level of ICT compliance of the lecturers needs a lot of attention. ICT is used by both Science and Arts inclined disciplines, therefore, the faculty/school where the Library Schools are located does not matter as long as the lecturers in the Library Schools in Nigeria are ICT compliant, Library and Information Science as a discipline can be easily imparted to library science students using modern information technologies. Being ICT compliant will also help both the practising and teaching librarians to be the sole producers of numerous Library Science softwares necessary for providing services in the libraries. Non-librarians especially Computer Scientists without knowledge of librarianship will no longer be allowed to produce Library Science softwares. Apart from the production of library science softwares, librarians will also be in the position to produce library-related security devices such as neural intelligence devices for shelving and shelve-reading purposes.

No doubt, with the incorporation of ICT facilities in the library work of today, library services have greatly changed in the right direction. Today library users can make use of the libraries from their offices or homes without physically visiting the libraries. Internet services have gone also a long way to assist individuals in satisfying their information needs. Generally, ICT facilities have improved all sectors of Nigerian economy and library services, especially the level of information accessibility among the populace, is significantly affected.

Conclusion

One can conclude that Library and Information Science education in Nigeria has some contending issues that have reduced the impact of the discipline on the society. In spite of the ICT facilities employed in teaching activities in most Library Schools, many libraries in Nigeria still find it difficult to render optimal services to the users. Many of the library services are still manually provided and this makes library services uninteresting and boring in this modern age. This ugly situation in most Nigerian libraries can change for better if librarians would make deliberate efforts to acquire ICT compliance in order to impart effective Library and Information Science knowledge to the students who, after graduation, will utilize the acquired IT skill to render active services to information seekers in the libraries. By so doing, most of the contending issues as highlighted in this paper will certainly become history.

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