

AN ASSESSMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE TRAINING IN NIGERIAN LIBRARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the issue of qualitative training of librarians at the undergraduate level in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to determine the quality of training received by students while in school both in terms of theory and practice, especially in the areas of information technology. Survey method was used by means of questionnaires distributed to library educators and 400 level students in three Nigerian library schools of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Delta State University, Abraka and University of Ibadan. The study discovers that a lot was done in terms of conventional librarianship theoretically and practically but not much was being achieved in the area of information technology due to such factors as poor status of laboratories and irregular power supply. The paper recommends better funding of library schools and more overseas seminars and workshops for library educators.

INTRODUCTION

Professional training of librarians in Nigeria started in 1960 when the first library school in the country took off as the Institute of Librarianship at the then University College Ibadan. The Institute remained the only library school in the country until 1968 when the Department of Library Science was established at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Zaria library school introduced a four-year degree programme leading to the award of Bachelor of Library Science as against the post graduate diploma of the Ibadan school.

In 1977, another library school was established at the Bayero University, Kano and in 1978, that of the University of Maiduguri was opened. The two library schools followed the pattern of Ahmadu Bello University with a four-year degree programme for professional training and diploma programmes for the para-professional training.

Most library schools that started later followed the pattern of ABU library school. Thus the number of library schools continued to be in the increase to meet the demands of the ever-increasing number of libraries in Nigeria. According to Ifidon (1999) "by 1999 there were eleven library schools in Nigeria with one Regional Centre for Information Science." By the year 2002, the number of library schools had increased to fifteen and eighteen in 2003, all Universities based. Apart from

these, there are other library schools scattered across the country offering Diploma, Higher Diploma and Certificate courses in Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Colleges of Arts, as well as Colleges of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies and even some Staff Development Colleges

This increase in the number of library schools is seen differently by various scholars and practitioners. Some view it as a proliferation of library school as opined by Saleh and Ochogwu(1994).

The 1980s witnessed a tremendous proliferation of library Schools and library and information programmes in various Kinds of institutions of higher learning such as Polytechnics, Colleges of education and schools of basic studies across the Country (p.135).

Some scholars see this development from different perspectives. Ojo Igbinoba (1995) believed that the demand for library personnel has to be met by either expanding the existing library schools or establishing new ones or both. From whatever angle one Views it, what is most paramount is qualitative training of librarians, so that high standard of professional practice can be maintained.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The performance of graduates of library schools in Nigeria have recently being criticized especially by practitioners. Some blame library educators for not doing enough in terms of practical training of the students while in school. To what extent do the students receive practical training in schools? And what is the impact of practical attachment to students training? Do our library schools have information technology laboratories and to what extent are they used in training students? These questions forms the basis of problems this paper wishes to address.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study covers three library schools in Nigeria. They are University of Ibadan Library School. Ahmadu Bello University Library School and Delta State University, Abraka. The Ibadan and Zaria library schools are the oldest in the country, while the Abraka library school is an entirely new one having been established in 1998. The study covers the under graduate degree training of these library schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

To assess the level of practical training received by students in library schools vis-à-vis its sufficiency.

To assess the level of equipment of the information technology laboratories of Nigeria library schools and extent to which these laboratories are used for Students training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The training of personnel to man Nigeria libraries locally is of great importance to the development of library education. This is because it saves cost of training the personnel outside the country. According to Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) the Nigeria library schools now supply over 99% of library professional personnel. Library education requires frequent assessment from different perspectives by practitioners and scholars so that useful suggestions can be made for improvement. Nzotta (1984) reviewed the development of library education in Nigeria between 1962-1983 and concluded that there has been a remarkable achievement in developing a suitable library education system that will meet the manpower needs of Nigerian libraries.

Ifidon (1999) discussed the essential knowledge base for academic and research librarians in a democratic culture in Nigeria, he traced the history and development of education for library and information science in Nigeria from 1960-1998 and reported that the number of library schools in Nigeria had risen from one to eleven within the period. His submission indicates that the existing curricula of library schools is inadequate for academic and research librarian. He proposed five category of courses, to enhance performances of academic and research librarians, these are general and compulsory courses, library science courses, core information science courses behavioural science (social skill) courses and cognate courses.

Erinle (2001) also identified a gap between theory and practice in Nigeria library schools in the are of information technology. He observed that there is lack of automated resources to teach the practical aspects of the course and suggested the need for Nigerian library schools to intensify effort in giving effective training in the use of information technology. However, Nwalo (2000) suggested a ten point collaboration blue print to enhance better practical teaching in the area of information technology. Some of these are to:

Identify all the computer training centers in and around the Parent institutions, inspect the facilities of such centers in order To determine their suitability or other wise for large scale Training of students: interact with the proprietors and staff of the Computer centers with a view to ascertaining their competence In providing basic computer literacy to library and information Studies students: design a basic computer literacy curriculum In liaison with the computer centers----- (p.37).

These assessments and suggestions made are no doubt targeted

toward better and improved library education in Nigeria. The hope and aim of every library school is to produce high quality librarians. For instance Sebestyen (2001) stated that the Department of Library Science at the Lorand Eotvos University, Hungary aims to educate well trained, independent, creative professionals who are able to manage institutions, make decision and carry out research.

This present assessment of library education by means of educators and students assessment on the quality of training received in library schools will no doubt reveal the extent and state of library education in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Survey method was used for this study. Questionnaires were distributed to educators and students in three-selected library schools. Two of the library schools are old and owned by the federal government, these are Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Ibadan. The third University is an entirely new one and owned by a state government, which is Delta State University, Abraka.

A total of twenty-five questionnaires were distributed to library educators in the three library schools out of which fifteen representing 60% were completed and returned. Also 50 questionnaires were distributed to 400 level students in the three library schools, out of which 34 (68%) were returned. Data analysis is by means of simple percentage and frequency count.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

A total of twenty-five questionnaires were sent to library educators. Nine (36%) of the questionnaires were sent to University of Ibadan, eight (32%) each were sent to Ahmadu Bello University and Delta State University. Fifty questionnaires were sent to 400 level students in the three Universities. Twenty ABU and fifteen each to Delta State University and University of Ibadan. Thirty-four of the fifty questionnaires representing 68% were returned. Table 1 below shows the distribution and return of questionnaires.

Table 1: Distribution and return of questionnaires.

Library school	Ownership	Year Established	No. of Questionnaires Distributed	No. of Questionnaires Returned
ABU	Federal	1968	8 educators	4 (50%)
			20 students	11 (55%)
DELSU	State	1998	8 educators 15 students	6 (75%) 9 (60%)
IBADAN	Federal	1959	9 educators 15 students	5 (55%) 14 (93%)
TOTAL	-	-	25 educators 50 students	15 (60%) 34 (68%)

(13.3%) did not respond to the question. On their part, the students assessment of their skill during practical attachment shows that (91.2%) of respondents believe that they have learnt much at their various places of attachment with 8.8% saying they have learnt little. In the same view, (91.2%) of them agree that their skill after the practical attachment is adequate to make them start work in the library with (8.8%) believing that their skill is not adequate.

The responses of library educators is a clear indication that the skill acquired by students in their practical attachment is adequate and prepare them for immediate employment. This is compromised by the students responses. On the number of credit hours allocated to practical attachment. Five (33.3%) of the educators consider it to be very adequate. 7 (46.7%) hold the view that it is adequate, while the remaining 3 (20%) are of the opinion that is inadequate. ABU students spend a total of 15 weeks (9cr) while Abraka and Ibadan spend 12 weeks (6cr) each. This period is considered long enough by the author to make an undergraduate learn well the core practical requirements of librarianship.

To further improve students' skill in library and information practice; library educators from time to time give assignments that will require students to visit libraries and information centers to observe certain skills. How often do teachers give such assignments to students? Their responses show that only one (6.7%) of the 15 respondents does not give assignment to students to observe library skills. It is very clear that based on the adequacy of practical training received in the school and their practical attachment in libraries and information centres coupled with frequent assignments given to students, library schools are giving enough training to students to make them perform creditably on employment. Infact their one year experience during the National Youth Service Corps add more to their exposure to library work.

However, it is very essential that an assessment of the information technology training be one in library schools in view of the role it plays in the delivery of service by library practitioners. Practical training in this regard is very essential to enhance graduate performance on the field. In order to achieve this, library schools require information technology laboratories and the extent to which these laboratories are equipped and utilized determines the level of training they can provide to students.

Table III: Availability of Information Technology Laboratories

Library School	Yes	No
ABU	11 (100%)	-
DELSU	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)
IBADAN	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)
TOTAL	29 (85.3%)	5 (14.7%)

The students were asked if their library schools have information technology laboratory. Their responses as reflected in table III indicate that all the 11 respondents from ABU testify to the fact that there is information technology laboratory; 6 (66.7%) of the DELSU students say they have IT laboratory with the remaining 3 (33.3%) saying there is no laboratory. And in Ibadan 12 (85.7%) of the respondents agrees that there is laboratory with only 2 saying there is no laboratory. With 85.3% of the respondents saying there is laboratory, it is upheld that the three schools have IT laboratory. The educators were asked the level of equipment of the laboratories in their various schools. Their responses reveal that 50% of respondents from ABU are of the opinion that laboratory is well equipped, 25% feels it is fairly equipped but as far as one (25%) respondent is concerned there is no laboratory. In DELSU, four (66.7%) of respondents believe the school laboratory is well equipped, while the remaining 33.3% say there is no laboratory the response from Ibadan shows 40% respondents in favour of the laboratory being fairly equipped and 60% poorly equipped. But to what extent are the laboratories used for students' training? The answer to this question is answered by both educators and students as reflected in table 4 below.

**Table IV: Level of Laboratory use for Training
Frequency of Laboratory Use**

Library School	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Not used	No Respondents	Total
ABU	Educators - 1(25%) Student -	2(50%) 5(45.5%)	1(25%) 6(54.5%)	-	-	4
DELSU	Educators - Student -	- 1(11.1%)	2(33.3%) 5(55.6%)	2(33.3%) 3(33.3%)	2(33.3%) -	6
IBADAN	Educators - Student -	2(40%) 3(21.4%)	2(40%) 8(57.1%)	1(20%) 2(14.3%)	- 1(7.1%)	5
TOTAL	1(6.7%)	4(26.7%) 9(26.5%)	5(33.3%) 19(55.9%)	3(20%) 5(14.7%)	2(12.3%) 1(2.9%)	15(100%) 34(100%)

From table IV 10 (66.7%) of the total respondents use the laboratory to teach students either very often, often or seldomly. However, seldom use of the laboratory predominate with 50% of the total number of those that use it to teach. In the same vein, 55.9% of the students from the three library schools stated that the laboratory is seldom used to teach them. Based on the responses, it is assumed that the library schools have information technology laboratory that are not properly equipped, perhaps that is why some respondents both educators and students feel they are no laboratories at all.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is pertinent to note that librarianship is a practical oriented profession and very technical as well. It is therefore essential that fresh graduates in to the profession be given adequate training in terms of theory and practical so that effective service can be assured to library users. This survey has revealed that Nigerian library schools provide enough theoretical and practical training to students in conventional librarianship. However, their practical training in the area of information technology application to library services is still very low. This can be the fact that there is information technology laboratory, 6 (66.7%) of the DELSU students say attributed to the poor status of their laboratories, just as unreliable power supply does allow the use of even the limited facilities.

Nigerian library schools should therefore expand their practical training attachment scheme to incorporate the collaboration with computer schools as suggested by Nwalo (2000) to boost the information technology training of the students. Furthermore, each library school should embark on laboratory development scheme to involve contributions from students, alumni and other professional and practitioners. Each University should endeavour to sponsor library educators for international workshops and seminars on library education and practice. This will further broaden their knowledge of information technology.

Finally, there should be adequate funding of library schools by various Universities and indeed government.