EDUCATION AND PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to discuss the challenges of education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria.

Design/Methodology/Approach: An exploratory approach through extensive review of related literatures was adopted for this study. Conceptual review was developed to understand the history of academic librarianship in Nigeria, the concept of academic librarianship and its situation in Nigeria. It also talked about the education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria.

Findings: This paper found out that there are certain factors hindering the success of the education and practice of academic librarianship such as low funding in universities and libraries, low employment opportunities and the poor image of the profession but to mention a few.

Practical Implication: This will ensure workable actions for academic librarianship in tackling the challenges faced by academic librarianship in Nigeria. It then becomes crucial for academic librarianship to foster creativity and innovativeness

Originality/Value: Efforts should be made on curriculum development to accommodate diverse jobs roles so as to produce quality graduate of library and information science that will project the image and opportunities in academic librarianship in Nigeria.

Keywords: academic librarianship, academic libraries, education, practice, Nigeria

Paper type: Conceptual

Introduction

Librarianship is an old profession that dated back for a long period. Cheong (2008) stated that librarianship is widely considered to be involved with principles and practices of collecting, organising, processing, disseminating and providing access to information irrespective of specific persons, location, age, nationality or gender. It is practiced in several types of libraries, national, special, academic, school. Academic libraries are libraries in higher institutions of learning that include universities, colleges of education and polytechnic. However, academic librarianship is a discipline that assists users, provides information, train users, organise and retrieve information, promotes information resources, preserve information, analyse information needs and build collections. These services bring about the uniqueness of librarianship.

Academic librarianship has always been a link between two entities; people and information.

It has also always been about using the information to serve the people whom we have different names for such as; user, patron, customer, clientele etc. The education and practice of academic librarianship plays a crucial role in the kind of services rendered to users and researchers. However, academic librarianship has some challenges with her education and practice in Nigeria. Some of which are recognition of librarianship as a profession, and the assault on professionalism. The need to find and retain quality leadership for libraries is a vital issue that needs to be looked into. There are fewer librarians entering into the academic librarianship field. Another issue is the issue of ensuring education of new librarians and re-educating existing librarians with new and innovative knowledge to support roles in a digital information age, especially roles that involve teaching and library profession, higher education funding, support of new users. American Library Association (2003)

supported this with issues like chaos in scholarly communication, impact of information technology on library services and recruitment, education and retention of librarians. Considering all these challenges in academic librarianship, it has become important for the education and practice of academic librarianship to be checked to produce effective services which will add to the dynamic, achievable and purposeful innovative output.

The objective of this paper is to look at the challenges of education and practice of academic librarianship. For this reason; this paper will explain history of academic librarianship in Nigeria, the concept of academic librarianship and its situation in Nigeria. It will also talk about the education of academic librarianship in Nigeria, the practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria, challenges of education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria. Conclusion and recommendation will be made.

History of Academic Librarianship in Nigeria

Academic library development dated back to pre-independence when University of Ibadan and its library was established; it was then called the University College in 1948. (Sobalaje&Ogunmodede, 2015). Aina (2007) revealed that the first Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum designed in Nigeria was in 1963 after the Institute of Librarianship at the University of Ibadan decided to do away with the Library Association (UK) Examination. The university decided to design its curriculum because it was obvious that the training offered at Ibadan then was preparing graduates for the British. The curriculum consisted mainly of (historical, social, economic and administrative background of libraries: book art: bibliography and reader services; technical services and types of libraries). This curriculum was also criticized as not reflecting situation in Nigeria, however in 1975, the programme was revamped to include courses such as oral information and rural information and community services and since then, many LIS schools in Nigeria have, over the years, been designing curricula for their various programmes.

The design of such curricula usually involved faculty members and/or librarian in the University libraries. In recent times, Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in Africa usually conduct tracer studies prior to designing appropriate curricula. (Aina, 1999). Other LIS schools use job adverts in which they would peruse various advertisements and identify LIS related jobs advertised in National Newspapers. Aina (1999) added that interviews with employers of librarians and other potential employers are also commonly used by LIS Schools in designing curricula. Itsekor (2011) opined that the governments of different countries establish libraries for the development of different sectors of the nation for instance, their educational, national, economic and public sectors etc. In societies where the government knows the importance of the libraries, they encourage not only the education sector but also the industries to set up libraries for the upward review of their operations. The growth of any organization is directly proportional to the knowledge base of its operations.

According to Ranasinghe (2007) the origin and development of libraries in Sub-Saharan African countries were influenced by the attitudes of its governing countries. The colonial government influenced the establishment of many libraries in African countries. In Nigeria, libraries were introduced by the colonial government and international organizations. The Nigerian government has done little or nothing in the development of libraries in Nigeria. Okiy (2006) reinstated this fact by stating that the general poor attitude of the Nigerian government towards development of libraries has adversely affected the development of public libraries services in Nigeria.

It must be realized that university libraries, being integral academic parts of the universities, usually emerge simultaneously with their parent institutions. Hence there are as many university libraries as there are universities in Nigeria today. The proliferation of

universities, despite the economic recession in Nigeria since the 1980s, has increased the problems of the universities and their libraries so much that now their future seems uncertain. Added to these problems are the problems of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Nigerian universities as related to library development. Ever since the problem of the literature explosion became noticeable in the 1970s, the developed world has devised various systems to facilitate the flow of information both within and across the countries, and developing countries are invited to take advantage of these devices.

However, this invitation is not often readily accepted by the developing nations like Nigeria because of some mitigating factors. These include the human factors, fear, and the level of development-cum infrastructure of the nation and so on. The case of application of modern technology in the library should start with the acceptance of the new technology as vital to the effective performance of the functions of the library (Ogunsola, 2004).

Concept of Academic Librarianship and Its Situation in Nigeria

According to Yacom (2011), academic librarianship is a profession established to take care of the information need of students, lecturers, researchers and other community of scholar. In the words of Wolpert (1999), academic librarianship is involved with cost effective information service and provide knowledge products to a community of scholars. The approach to cost effective information service provision is one of the major problem militating the performances of academic library in Nigeria.

Academic librarianship play a major role in the manpower development of any nation providing the high, as well as middle level manpower for the acceleration of social, economic and political advancement of a nation. According to Okiy (2007), quoting Edoka (2000) that the general nature of Academic librarianship are as follows: provision of information materials required for the academic programmes of the parent institution, research

of information resources in consonance with the needs of faculty and research students, provision of information resources for recreation and personal self - development of users, study accommodation in a useful variety of locations, protection and security for these materials, specialized information service to appropriate segments of the wider community, and to co-operate with other libraries at appropriate levels for improved information services.

Academic librarianship in Nigeria is at a crossroad. This is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. Nigerian academic libraries derive the greater part of their funds from the government (both Federal and State). Okiy (2005) notes that of all the different types of libraries in Nigeria, only university libraries have a clearly defined policy of funding, because they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institutions. However, it is regrettable that such monies are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision (Okiy, 2005; Yetunde, 2008).

This ugly situation affects the efficiency and effectiveness of their functions. However, despite the not so encouraging situation in terms of funding, recent efforts made in the area of Internet and ICTs in academic libraries in Nigeria reported in the literature has been encouraging (Womboh& Abba, 2008; Fatoki, 2005; Etim, 2006) where academic libraries made series of attempts to adopt the technologies for improved services.

However, most academic libraries in Nigeria are severely constrained by a number of factors that includes erratic internet services, lack of hardware and software and in most instances the non-availability of ICTs in some academic libraries. Besides, there is difficulty in the importation of books and journals due to the high rise in foreign exchange. This has deterred many academic libraries in Nigeria from acquiring current and relevant titles that will support the academic programmes of their parent institutions. Thus the effort of most academic libraries in providing modern

information services is thwarted by the existence of the aforementioned problems.

Education of Academic Librarianship in Nigeria

The standard of education of the citizenry of any nation, determines the level of development of the nation. Education is a key factor in the concept of development and libraries are very important and essential tools for attaining national objectives of human resource and economic development (Okiy, 2012). This implies that, as information professionals, librarians should not be left out in all forms of educational process. Educational administrators should be involved in the design of library school curricula. As stated in the national policy on education, one of the goals of university education is to acquire both physical and intellectual skills to enable individuals to become self- reliant and useful members of the society (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). From the librarians' point of view, the national policy on education in its statement above was actually referring to the library; as this is what the library is known for. The library is known for acquiring information resources and making them available for their users to build their physical and intellectual skills to enable individuals to become self- reliant and useful members of the society.

The National University Commission (NUC), the government umbrella organisation that oversees the administration of higher education in Nigeria, listed 174 universities comprising 43 federal universities, 52 state universities and 79 private universities as accredited degree granting institution on its website as of 2020. These universities spread amongst the six geo-political zones. Many of these institutions are relatively new and not all of them award degrees in LIS. The Nigerian Library Association and the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria are the consortia in charge of running the affairs of librarians nationwide. In the light that, the Federal Ministry of Education develops curriculum and syllabuses for schools and has libraries as a vital part of educational institution, it is very necessary that librarians are involved in the implementation of the aspect of the section for libraries in the National Policy on Education which states that proprietors of school shall provide functional libraries at all levels. Libraries education is therefore expected to be implemented right from high schools.

Presently, there are over 30 universities offering LIS programmes out of which 26 are accredited library schools. Aina (2007) opined that the Bachelors of Library Science training programme was pioneered in Nigeria at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1968. Since then many other library schools that have been accredited by NUC have involved in training both at undergraduate and graduate levels. Library and Information Science programmes are run in thirteen (13) federal universities; nine (9) state universities and four (4) private universities, i.e. in total of 26 out of 174 universities in Nigeria. (LRCN, 2014). However, In January 2020, The National Open University of Nigeria advertised B. Library and Information Science as a new programme accredited by NUC.

Library and Information Science education in Nigeria is practised in most complex and diverse way based on several specializations. Opeke (2007) remarked that differences occur in programme structures, duration and content of courses, ways of teaching and assessment, student placement and departmental focus. As a result of these variations in Nigeria library schools, all the scholars strongly called for harmonization and standardization of the curriculum of library and information education in Nigeria. This according to her could be achieved through the collaboration of educators, practitioners, National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE), Nigerian Library Association and Nigerian Librarian Registration Council. Opeke (2007) expressed her current dissatisfaction in the library and information profession about the inadequacy of LIS education to meet current individual, organizational and societal information needs. This she attributed to a combination of various elements such as globalization, fast technological development, new organizational patterns, changing nature of work and occupation, increasing importance of information as an organizational resource as well as greater focus on organizational productivity.

Tiamiyu (1999) opined that there should be an increase in the number of subjects that academic librarians are expected to know due to the nature of their practice. According to him, curricula of education for library and information programmes should be so multi-faceted and last longer than those of other professions. The information professionals are also enjoyed to continually learn and master new technologies on the job and on a continuous basis at the risk of becoming dinosaurs in their prime employers of information professionals for the emerging market. In Nigeria, currently, academic librarians require skills in the areas of computer programming, systems analysis, office administration, public relations, writing and editing, advice work, statistics, research, organizing and retrieving information, librarianship, records management, training and interpersonal communication.

The need to re-design the courses that would be taught especially in Nigerian library and information Science schools has been raised by different scholars. Aina (1999) remarked that Nigerian library schools have devoted so much time and space to some courses that should not take more than 10 lecture hours. He suggested that courses such as history of library of archives and information centres, libraries and society, library administration, history of graphic communication, collection development, reference sources and services, academic, special libraries etc should not and must not be constituted as each course. Rather, some of them could be lumped together as part of the LIS module. This could be for creating time for other specialisations to be taught

The emerging market provides job outlets for librarians, who in addition to the basic library skill, also possessed knowledge about Information and Communication Technology (ICT) publishing, archives and records management, public relations/advocacy and basic statistics skills. In view of this, Aina (2007) submitted that

courses such as basic computer skills, computer applications (word processing, PowerPoint, database management systems), networking, internet surfing and web design and publishing, public relations, editing and writing, advocacy, conservation and preservation, theories of archives and records management courses be included in the curricula of library schools in Nigeria.

However, since the library is a service organisation and the library services involve the interaction between people, it is important that academic librarians be taught personnel issues. However, Large (1991) cautioned that educational curriculum must reflect the local needs and resources of users and faculty in Nigeria. That is, the demand of the local employment market must not be ignored. Aina (2007) also shared this view as he observed that rural community information services should not be neglected in the new curriculum whereby there is universal access and service to information. He emphasized that Librarians need to be trained for the local needs, librarian skills would definitely be needed, for example in health activities, agricultural extension, public health, information repackaging, management, documentation of indigenous knowledge, preservation and conservation of records, provision of query and answer services in the communities.

Practice of Academic Librarianship in Nigeria

In the last few decades, the advent of Google, the massive revolution of ICT , the explosion of free online content, the ubiquitous use of social networking tools have influenced the practice of academic librarianship all over the world especially in Nigeria. It is now more convenient and easier for easier access to information. Therefore, academic librarianship in Nigeria should do more thinking and activities amongst themselves on how to get the attention of users and bring them back to the library. This then might be the big transition in librarianship today in Nigeria. Okon (2005) added that the rapid development in the field of ICT has promoted a review of the Library and Information Sciences (LIS) profession.

The practice of LIS is now characterised with a paradigm shift to an electronic environment where emphasis is placed more on the

acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases. Notwithstanding, traditional library practices are still relevant. There are Minimum standards and guidelines for academic libraries in Nigeria issued by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) in accordance with LRCN Act 1995. They are specifically issued in pursuant to section 2b of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Act of 1995 and are subject to periodic review by LRCN and other Stakeholders. These standards and guidelines are mandatory for all institutions, private or public, which receive any form of funding from the Federal Government or are available to the general public.

They further stated that academic librarianship should engage in activities.For professional library staff to practice, minimum of first degree in library and information science or a first degree in another discipline with masters in library and information science; certification with Librarians' Registration Council of Nigerian (LRCN); Evidence of publication of scholarly works; ICT competencies and literacy; and regular training and retraining. For Para-professional library staff to practice, minimum of national diploma in library and information science; ICT competencies and literacy; and regular training and retraining. Library supporting staff must possess qualifications in the desired areas; acquire higher qualifications in the desired areas; ICT competencies; and regular training and retraining (LRCN, 2014). That will promote the gainful use of the resources and services of the academic library as well as meeting the needs of library users. These, they shall do through the following activities: readership campaign, exhibition, advocacy, library use instruction, library and shelf guides, library talks, orientation, display of new arrivals, current awareness services and selective dissemination of information (SDI).

Challenges of Education and Practice of Academic Librarianship in Nigeria

The challenges facing education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria like all profession in academic sectors are changes that are found within the university both when learning and practising. Some challenges have been observed overtime within the education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria. Some challenges have been stated. They include remuneration and funding, recruitment and retention of librarians, recognition of academic librarianship as a profession, support for new users and lastly, the state of academic librarianship in a global era.

Taking into account the state of the economy, academic librarianship could be faced with the possibility of reductions in funding that could have a damaging effect on library wages, salaries, programs and resources to be used. One of the most pressing problems for Nigeria's education system remains the severe underfunding of its universities. The federal government, which is responsible for sustaining public universities, has over the past decade not significantly increased the share of the government budget dedicated to education, despite exploding student numbers. Due to funding constraints, most of Nigeria's public universities are in deteriorating condition, their lecture halls are severely overcrowded, students to teacher ratios have increased and lecturer shortages are chronic (World Education Services, 2017). How then can academic libraries provide access to every information users and researchers need especially now when the cost of resources has risen precipitously?

The recruitment and retention of academic librarians is a core issue especially for the future of librarianship and particularly for their role in academic enterprise (Sobalaje & Ogunmodede, 2015). The importance and relevance of the academic library as a place of intellectual simulation are maintained by librarian's dedication. The recognition of librarianship as a profession is another key issue in Nigeria.

"The term 'librarian' is lightly used, and often applied to an official who is placed in charge of a collection of books, with very meagre knowledge of their contents and still less knowledge of the profession to which he purports to belong. This attitude on the part of some authorities results in a salary being paid which is totally inadequate for the responsibilities of the post. The inevitable result is that the profession as it stands today offers

little or no attraction to a person with ambition, and who has a future to provide for." (Munford, 1976:98).

Support for new users is another issue in academic librarianship in Nigeria. New users would need literacy on the use and access of information. If they are not informed, new users may fall victim of ethics like plagiarism, privacy and copyright issues that show a general lack of respect for scholarship and research. Lastly, the state of academic librarianship in a global era makes the issue of academic librarianship a critical one. 'Global challenges' have affected the university as an institution and have had a knock-on effect on the library. With globalisation, academic librarianship needs to keep up with changes that come with the global era to be relevant and to compete with all jobs anywhere in the world in the 21stcentury (Simisaye, 2014).

Conclusion

If academic librarianship is to survive as a profession, librarians should shift from a responsive model to a pro-active model, by being at the vanguard of innovation, and not be seen as mere implementers or book selectors, as there is no time or place for conformity. This will involve looking for innovative way of educating librarians to fit this present day through teaching, learning and research. This will involve modification of the library and information science curriculum to accommodate all area needed for a 21st academic librarian.

Although, the university libraries is supposed to provide numerous and adequate library and information resources and services but certain factors such as inadequate funding, poor skills and knowledge, include remuneration and funding, recruitment and retention of librarians, recognition of academic librarianship as a

profession, support for new users . Lastly, the state of academic librarianship in a global era poses problems to these libraries in Nigeria. Academic librarianship should therefore be improved in both education and practice so it can be a tool for every form of development in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on the challenges of education and practice of academic librarianship in Nigeria, the following are therefore recommended:

1. Human resources department needs to ensure education of new librarians and re-educating existing librarians with skills and knowledge to support new roles in an electronic environment.

2. Academic librarians must look for ways to promote the values, expertise and leadership of the profession throughout the country for appreciation of the roles librarians can do and carry out.

3. Academic librarians should take advantage of student enthusiasm, creativity and technical skills. At the same time, librarians should observe the general and growing lack of literacy among students, along with flexible ethics.

4. Academic librarians should think creatively and with action to compensate for the already low pay of academic librarians.

5. LIS curriculum must be re-structured keeping in view the new technological trends in the profession and demand of job market in digital era.

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