

## **Periscopic Survey of Current Library and Information Science Education and Practice in Nigeria**

**By  
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### **Abstract**

The paper is theoretical, more of a firsthand experience of what the author has observed as the current trends in Nigerian library and information science education and practice. The trends observed are increased ICT component in library schools curricula, increasing resort to the use of ICTs, which has also given rise to the challenge for digitization, archiving and preservation of electronic resources; proliferation of opportunities for training and retraining, which the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria has braced up to with quality assurance measures to ensure that quality assurance is neither compromised in library schools nor in the field of practice; and entrepreneurship education aimed at producing self-employed graduates. The other trends are collaborative librarianship through consortium building to ensure sharing of resources, which is made easier by ICT application; decreased funding of libraries and influence of librarians as principal officers due to their inability to fit into the internal politics of their institutions; and a possibility for 24 hours library service, which many institutions' libraries are planning the groundwork for. The paper submits that with better operational environments, Nigerian librarians will be able to respond better to existing and emerging trends in library and information practice.

### **Introduction**

Library education and practice have come a long way in Nigeria, and have made great impact on the Nigerian society and the entire West African sub-region, notwithstanding the many challenges the profession and its practitioners have encountered. In all the library types, practitioners have made their mark. Those that have practiced before us have made their mark in the traditional setting in which they had to operate. In our own generation, we are continuing to make modest progress by responding to the challenges and the dynamic direction by which library education and practice are pulling us. And for the generation that is taking after us, they are making and will make further progress by being responsive to the challenges offered by the social, political, economic, educational, technological and environmental dynamics of the society.

It is very important to note at this point that one cannot talk of new trends in Nigerian librarianship without touching on the trends in world librarianship because the former takes its character from the latter, and again because we are part of the global practice of the profession. However, this author would try as much as possible to keep to the topic as framed. This paper will thus be approached from the following sub-topics: information and communication technology in library education; digitization, archiving and preservation of electronic materials; training and retraining opportunities; quality assurance; entrepreneurship education; consortium building; decreased funding of libraries by funding authorities and parent institutions; decreased influence of librarians in tertiary institutions; and twenty-four hours library service.

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) In Library Education and Practice**

Increasingly, the library schools in Nigeria have attuned their curricula towards modern realities. One way of doing this is to have adequate ICT content in all the library schools' curricula. This is aimed at producing graduates with ICT skills and competencies that can serve satisfactorily in today's ICT-driven library environment.

ICT skills and competencies are not just taught theoretically in these schools but in most of them there exist computer and Internet laboratories where the students have hands-on experience. Abubakar's (2010) study revealed that ICTs were not only available in Nigerian library schools but were also put to good use from time to time. Abubakar did his study with regard to the library schools at Abia State University, Uturu; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Bayero University, Kano; University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri; and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It is not just the library schools alone that have embraced the teaching of ICT skills and competencies. In the field of practice, the various library categories are implementing ICTs in their services. They are doing this through the establishment of e-libraries or computer laboratories with Internet connectivity where good numbers of computers are brought together to facilitate users' access to electronic resources. For example, the University of Jos Library at the Bauchi Road Campus alone has three computer laboratories where altogether 230 systems can be used to access electronic resources.

Some of the libraries where these computer laboratories exist have gone further to have their own websites, which apart from making their presence felt world wide are able to have links to several e-resources (especially open access materials) for their users' benefits. The open access materials, though free, are of immense value to their users. For example, the University of Abuja website ([www.uniabujalibrary.net](http://www.uniabujalibrary.net)) has links to many databases, among which are: African Journals Online (AJOL), Academic Journals, Arab Social Science Research Virtual Library, AGORA, ABC Chemistry, Hinari and Initude Arts and Humanities. Others are Open J-Gate, JSTOR, Hindawi, BMJ Publishing, High Wire Press, Bioline International and NUC Virtual Library.

Practitioners have also embraced ICT tools not only for accessing information but also for its sharing. Using web 2.0, for example, some librarians and information professionals in Nigeria are helping to actualize participatory information sharing. They are no longer passive recipients of information generated by others but are active generators of information, such as local contents, institutional repositories, etc which they are freely sharing with others. Information sharing is the in-thing as observed by Ekoja (2010) because the tradition of holding on possessively and selfishly to books and other information conveying media is no longer the practice. The technologies that have evolved to further information sharing using web 2.0 are blogs, wikis, really simple syndication (rss), tagging, podcasts, chats, etc.

Librarians are also embracing ICTs for other library operations like online transactions with publishers and book vendors, online cataloguing, OPAC, online communication with users, etc.

#### **Digitization, Archiving and Preservation of Electronic Materials**

Owing to existing practices, documents are now first created in digital forms. Even where they are in print, measures are being taken in some libraries to convert them into digital formats, like the National Library of Nigeria has been doing with eight newspaper titles since December, 2004. The newspapers are digitized into CDs and made available on sale to interested libraries and other organizations.

Libraries are also archiving materials of interest, which they come across online because the chances are that if this is not done, a future visit to the sites where they were first accessed could prove that they

no longer existed. Increasingly too, local contents and institutional repositories are being digitized and archived.

Digitization and archiving of electronic materials have also brought upon libraries the responsibility to preserve them for future use and re-use. Preservation is aimed at ensuring that the electronic materials remain accessible and usable for as long as is required, notwithstanding technological (both hardware and software) modifications or change. Unfortunately, however, out of the several preservation options that are available, migration of digital objects was the most popular among two topmost information institutions, i.e. the National Library of Nigeria and the National Archives as established by Ekoja and Gbaje (2012).

#### **Training and Retraining Opportunities**

There are far greater opportunities for library and information science training and retraining in Nigeria today than ever before. As at the last count in June, 2012, there were 26 universities and seven polytechnics offering approved courses in library and information science. Courses offered range from Diploma up to Ph.D.

The professional body for librarians, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), has consistently engaged in its Annual Conferences and General Meetings where interesting and topical issues in library and information science are handled by seasoned academics and professionals. The theme for the 2012 National Conference and General Meeting was *Nigerian Library Association at 50: Promoting Library and Information Science Profession for National Development and Transformation*. Papers were presented by experts and other professionals on the various sub-themes. The Association also celebrated its golden jubilee on this occasion that was held at the International Conference Centre in Abuja. The NLA Annual conferences have been very good training and retraining fora for librarians and information professionals who use them to acquire and/or update their knowledge of the field. This position is supported by Eke (2011) who "established that conference attendance is a practical avenue for professional development of librarians." She urged librarians to attend professional conferences "in order to learn more about professional issues, to brainstorm with colleagues and elites in the profession, to learn new occurrences ... and to get updated on existing knowledge."

Apart from the NLA, its sections and chapters have also engaged in providing training and retraining

opportunities for librarians. There are 37 chapters, one in each of the 36 states of the Federation, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. There are 13 Sections, from which three examples are here presented with regard to their 2012 seminars/workshops.

i) The 2012 Annual Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Seminar/Workshop was the 32<sup>rd</sup> in the series and it was held at Benin City, Edo State between 21<sup>st</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> October. Its general theme was *Repositioning the Cataloguer for Information Management in a Networked Environment*. It had six sub-themes, among which were Realities of Information Management in a Networked Environment; Mentoring in Cataloguing: Bridging the Gap between the Old and the Young; Cataloguing Online-How Do We Do It (Practical); Conventions, Tools and Technologies of Information Management in a Networked Environment; New Features of the Library Catalogue in a Networked Environment (Practical); and Creating Metadata for Digital Content (Practical).

ii) The Information Technology Section of the NLA held its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Library and Information Technology Today (LITT) National Workshop at Abeokuta from 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2012. The theme was *Creating Innovative Libraries in Nigeria*, with seven sub-themes. Among the sub-themes were Library Practice Today; Enterprise Solutions: Practices and Trends; Web Design: Creating the Ultimate Interface; Fifty Fresh Tips and Tools to Empower Progressive Library Professionals; Content Management; and Library Issues and Challenges.

iii) The 2012 Annual Seminar/Workshop of the Academic and Research Libraries Section was the 4<sup>th</sup>. It was held at Calabar between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012 with the theme: *Academic and Research Library Practice in the Digital Environment*. Among its seven sub-themes were Open Access and Institutional Repositories for Academic and Research Libraries; Digital Records Management, Preservation, Archiving and Security in Academic and Research Libraries; Use of Social Media in the Provision of Information Services in Academic and Research Libraries; Repositioning Academic and Research Libraries in the Digital Environment; Ethical and Legal Issues in Information Management, Access and Use in the Digital Environment; Information Literacy Requirements in the Digital Environment; and Principles of Digital Library and Information Management.

The Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), apart from ensuring quality assurance in Nigerian library schools and library practice has also undertaken a number of measures to facilitate the

training and retraining of library and information practitioners in Nigeria. It has done this through organizing of workshops and production of manuals for different categories of librarians, an example of which is the Manual for School Librarians.

It is also gratifying to know that the LRCN, in conjunction with the Federal Government was working to review library and information science curriculum in all the 26 universities offering the course (Olugbile, 2012). This he explained was “to ensure that graduates from library schools in Nigeria are equipped with the competencies required to function effectively in the management of all categories of libraries.” It is the plan, according to the LRCN Registrar, that by 2013 the Council would “partner with the National Universities Commission to review LIS curriculum in Nigeria with a view to bringing it in tandem with global best practices and equip graduates with the requisite skills to function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

It is also noteworthy to mention the move by the NUC in 2003 that resulted in Use of Library and Study Skills being made credit earning course in all Nigerian Universities, as a General Studies course for all undergraduates. This was during the last merger of the Benchmark and Minimum Academic Standards (2003). Before then, this course formed a part of the Use of English in Nigerian Universities.

#### **Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance is becoming more and more entrenched in library education and practice in Nigeria. The LRCN sets the standard of knowledge and the skills required by librarians and ensures that this is complied with by being part of accreditation teams to library schools. It also regulates the practice of librarianship in the country by determining who is a librarian and goes ahead to register those who are found qualified. In 2005, the first set of 538 chartered librarians were inducted at Abeokuta and the second set numbering 1,177 were inducted at Abuja in 2011. The third set of Librarians numbering 948 were also inducted at Abuja in 2012. The LRCN also sets and maintains the standards for all categories of libraries, as well as ensuring professional discipline among librarians through granting and renewal of licenses to register librarians and even de-registering those found unworthy.

#### **Entrepreneurship Education**

In addition to the general entrepreneurship course offered as general studies for Nigerian University undergraduates, a lot of library and information science-specific entrepreneurship courses now form

part of the curricular of library schools. These have been integrated into library education in Nigeria because of increasing unemployment and the realization that not all library school graduates can get paid jobs either in the private or public sectors. Library and information entrepreneurship education is intended to make graduates to be self-employed, self-reliant and even employers of labour. According to Bitrus and Ikyembe (2011), entrepreneurship education can lead graduates into becoming book authors, Internet consultants, fee-charging cataloguers and indexers, information brokers, book vendors, etc.

### **Consortium Building**

Librarians in Nigeria now see a more compelling need for consortium building or collaborative librarianship. This is because it is becoming more than ever before glaring that libraries cannot go-it-alone. Another obvious reason for this is that we are in an era of information sharing made more readily possible with the use of ICTs.

Though there were earlier efforts at consortium building among libraries in Nigeria, the three most visible consortia today are:

1. Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULIB). This was set up by the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) with the support of EIFL.net in 2002. EIFL.net is an international not-for profit organization based in Europe with a global network of partners. In partnership with this organization, NULIB has been able to facilitate access to moderately priced electronic resources by Nigerian University libraries. For example, with three hundred thousand naira only by each member library, participating university libraries could access EBSCO Host and other electronic resources for three years. For about the same resources, the National Universities Commission (NUC) is proposing to cut at source six million seven hundred and ninety thousand fifteen kobo (6,790,000.15) from the 2012 Telfund intervention of each of the 74 public universities and inter-university centres in Nigeria.

Prof. D.O. Bozimo must be acknowledged here for the huge successes recorded so far by NULIB, notwithstanding her many challenges. The current Chairman is Dr. Benedict Oladele, University Librarian, University of Ibadan.

- i) Nigerian Monotechnic and Polytechnic Libraries Consortium (NIMPOLIC)
- ii) Nigerian College Libraries Consortium (NCLIC)

### **Decreased Funding of Libraries by Funding Authorities and Parent Institutions.**

There is decreased funding of libraries by funding authorities and parent institutions. In federal universities, the 1992 hard-earned ASUU-Federal Government agreement on the allocation of 10% of total recurrent expenditure, also known as Library Development Fund (LDF) going to their libraries has been stopped as far back as 2001. This was because the NUC was able to convince the then government that it was better to use the allocations to provide a central virtual library services than making money available to individual university libraries. This was how the NUC Virtual Library came into being.

The implication of a situation as above is that the role of institutional libraries as the providers of library services to their communities is being eroded by supervisory agencies. It is in this spirit of erosion of responsibilities of institutional libraries that the NUC is also proposing to deduct at source almost seven million naira each from the 2012 Telfund allocation of all public universities in order, as is being claimed, to facilitate online access for them.

Parent institutions too, are shirking their responsibilities to their libraries by failing to fund them. Some public tertiary institution libraries rely almost 100% on Telfund library intervention. Though very reliable and regular in coming, these allocations are not sufficient since they were in the first place meant to complement the regular budgets of institutional libraries. Telfund must however be commended for the significant increase recorded in library intervention allocation in 2012. For example, each public university library received a grant of 53 million naira, up from 25 million naira the previous year.

The result of under funding of most institutional libraries by their parent bodies is that they are unable to purchase their most needed books and journals. They are forced instead to rely mainly on donations, most of which are not relevant to their needs. The argument of many institutional heads is that provided libraries have access to online resources, they are sufficient. This argument is a fallacy because the electronic resources are meant to complement print books, journals and other materials. This is still the practice in institutional libraries in even the developed countries of the world.

### **Decreased Influence of Libraries in Tertiary Institutions**

Also on the decline in tertiary institutions is the visibility and influence of librarians, especially as

principal officers. Many librarians in tertiary institutions no longer have the clout of their predecessors who wielded a lot of influence. This is due to the inability of most librarians to fit in rightly or wrongly into the crude politics of their parent institutions.

#### **Twenty-Four Hours Library Services.**

One novel area coming into library practice in Nigeria is the 24 hours library service. This service already exists in many parts of the world but is only gradually coming into our practice. There is hardly anywhere it exists now in Nigeria but in terms of some new library designs, 24 hours library section is being provided for. For example, there is a section for this practice at the Nasarawa State University Library, Keffi and in the University of Abuja Library building under construction, there is provision for it as well.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper can hardly claim to be exhaustive of what constitutes new trends in Nigerian library and information science education and practice. It has, however, been able to identify some of them and they include widespread ICT application; digitization, archiving and preservation of electronic materials; training and retraining opportunities; quality assurance; entrepreneurship education; consortium building; decreased funding of libraries and influence of librarians; and the introduction of twenty-four hours library service.

In embracing these new trends, practitioners are encountered with many challenges. It is hoped that with better operational environment, our libraries will be able to adjust more effortlessly to these trends and many more that will arise in the course of time. One possible area that will require attention in the course of time will be for Nigerian librarians to respect the rights of their users to their privacy so that they can control access and use of their personal information. Though this is not yet an issue in our legal experience, it is something that could arise over time. Related to this is the issue of ethical and legal implications in information management, access and use in the digital environment.

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