THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN THE REVITILISATION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BY

Rita Otibhor SALAMI
Senior Librarian
University Library Service
Federal University of Technology
Minna

Khadiza Avosuahi Ozovehe Sadiku
University Library Services
Federal University of Technology
Minna

Nancy Patrick ZAMANI
University Library
Federal University, Wukari
Wukari
Correspondence Email:
r.otibhor@futminna.edu.ng

Paul Abutu
University Library Services
Federal University of Technology
Minna

Abstract

The paper examined the role of research in the revitalisation of library and information science (LIS) education in Nigeria. The paper identified issues of LIS education in Nigeria to include unskilled manpower, lack of attention by the government and poor level of curriculum development. Research remains an inevitable tool for the revitalisation of LIS education in Nigeria such as curriculum development and an avenue to raise funds. The paper identified challenges of LIS research in Nigeria to include inadequate research funds, inadequate research skills, poor attitude to research and lack of infrastructure. The paper concluded that there should be training and retraining of library and information science educators on innovative research skills.

Keywords: Revitalisation; Library and Information Science Education; Research; Role; Nigeria

Introduction

The history of library and information science (LIS) education in Nigeria dates back to a seminar organised by UNESCO held at the University of Ibadan in the year 1953. The seminar was centred on the development of public libraries in Africa. At the end of the seminar, it was recommended that library schools should be established in Africa to provide professional training for would-be librarians. Before this period, the training of librarians who were to man public libraries in Nigeria was trained mainly in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of iii--America (USA). At the end of the programme, the certificate that was offered to participants was mostly non-graduate type like the British ALA. According to Abubakar (2015), it was also necessary to find library schools because during that period most of the libraries in Nigeria were manned by expatriates.

The first library school was founded and funded by the Carnegie Cooperation of New York. In the first instance, they surveyed the library need of the country and then recommended that a postgraduate course in a library should be established. The library school was later established at the Institute of Librarianship at the University of Ibadan. The shortcoming of the new programme was that the institute only offered post-graduate diploma in librarianship. The second library school to be established in Nigeria was at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

The library school at Zaria started with an undergraduate course in librarianship. The aim of establishing the library school was to educate and train librarians at the undergraduate level against that of Ibadan who offered only postgraduate diplomas. (Abubakar, 2015 *et al.*)

Over some time, there has been significant growth in the number of library and information science schools in Nigeria. as of 2021, there are 37 Federal, State and private university-based library schools in Nigeria. There are also quite several polytechnics and colleges of technology offering LIS Salami *et al.*(2021) believe that there has been significant growth in the number of library schools in Nigeria has not positively translated to the growth of the profession. As a result of this, most LIS graduates fail to meet the immediate needs and requirements of the current LIS work environment in the 21st century. Ejedafiru and Oghenetega (2014) opined that the library and information science profession in Nigeria is faced with problems of poor delivery strategies, poor practices, and the problems of the skills gap. These challenges in the profession have resulted in performance by most LIS graduates in their workplace.

There is a clarion call for the revitalisation of LIS education in Nigeria. It is no longer news that the profession is undergoing various changes such as the application of new technology, knowledge management, data management, digitalization, knowledge management, content management, and archival management. Ononogbo (2015) stressed that there was a need for the revitalization of the LIS curriculum. The curriculum should reflect on what the employer of labour demands from the students, required skills of the educators, facilities and how the profession should be practised to adapt to the times, how information should be collected, organised, stored, retrieved and ultimately disseminated. To bring these issues into the limelight, there is a need to research to formulate policies that will serve as a guide for the development of higher education in Nigeria. The paper addresses the role of research in the revitalisation of library and information science education in Nigeria.

Importance of Research in the Revitalisation of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria

It is worthy to note that there is an increase in demand for librarians who are to take charge of overseeing various new libraries and information centers springing up in Nigeria. However, there is a compelling need to improve the quality of education in order not to just meet the demand for necessary manpower but to also ensure that the library professionals who are employed are well skilled and competent. As of today, Library and information science (LIS) education are in a gory state as a result of unskilled manpower. Several LIS educators lack effective teaching skills especially in the application of Information Technology in their academic activities. This was corroborated by Ejedafiru and Oghenetega (2014) who stated that the library and information science profession in Nigeria is faced with problems of poor delivery lack of infrastructure, lack of funds. In addition, Abubakar (2021) also stated that library and information science education is faced with issues such as shortage of Information Technology facilities, improper development, implementation and review of LIS curriculum, inadequate collaboration and poor ICT literacy skills.

To proffer solutions to the above issues there is need for LIS educators to undergo researches. For research leads to the creation of new knowledge in the profession especially in the development of curriculum. This view was also corroborated byObura and Kingongo-Bukenya (2011) who posited that research is necessary in LIS discipline as a result of curriculum development and review. The success of the library profession depends to a large extent on the curriculum used in the training of students. Through research, the LIS curriculum will be able to review the contents of their curriculum, to prepare LIS students with knowledge and skills that would enable them to succeed in the new information age.

Also, research is a vehicle for solving problems that continually arise in the profession.In short, research is important in the field of LIS for through research various tools and methods are developed to solve day-to-day problems that arise in the profession to deliver effective and efficient services. Research also enables professionals to make decisions based on the strongest evidence.

Research is also important in the process of teaching and the formation of LIS students. For it inculcate critical thinking, curiosity, discipline, and teamwork. Research when properly focused and conducted is a veritable catalyst for the development of LIS as it serves as an avenue to generate information and knowledge which may be developed and delivered in a form that will be found useful.

Research can also be a source of funding for LIS education in Nigeria. Such funds could be awarded from federal and state government, indirect government funding, private sector, international donor agencies, and research grants This is important for the revitalisation of library and information science education in Nigeria because research is grossly underfunded in Nigeria. Also, through commercialisation of research outputs, LIS professionals will be able to generate funds to execute researches and purchase facilities.

Research output helps to direct a researcher's contribution to knowledge which improve his/her visibility and the department and university. within a chosen community. This will attract grants and also influence opinions, policy, or decision-making as regards the profession.

Challenges in Library and Information Science Education Research in Nigeria

Research is one of the essential tools for the revitalisation of library and information science education. However, LIS professionals face several problems in conducting research. Firstly, there is the issue of the inadequate fund. Complex researches require a lot of funds to execute. Most library and information science professionals are faced with the issue of the fund to undergo projects, attend seminars and training. Most researchers are sponsored by the government which is not adequate to support research.

According to Research consulting (2019),much of Nigeria's research appears to be of low quality, as inferred by the low number of citations recorded by Nigerian research publications compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries. As a result of this challenge, library and information science professionals do not publish in quality journals.

For instance, the index to journals in Education and Library, Information Science and Technology abstract databases between 2000 and 2018 indicated that 1,106 articles were published by library and information science professionals in Nigerian Universities. The breakdown shows 17.6% of the articles were from the University of Ibadan, 10.2% from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 9.9%, and 0.6% were from Delta State University and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (Okeji,2018). This is an indication of the low level of research productivity of library and information science educators in Nigeria. This is also a major factor accounting for the very low accessibility of external grants by library and information science educators. Thirdly, there is also the issue of inadequate infrastructural facilities in conducting research. LIS professionals are faced with ill-equipped facilities, epileptic internet services.

Fourthly, poor attitude to research is another issue affecting research in LIS education in Nigeria. Most LIS professionals engage in researches for a reward such as promotion. In most universities in Nigeria, the publication is the major criteria for the assessment of faculty members and their subsequent elevation to the next level. According to Directorate for Research Innovation and Development (2016), some faculty members in Nigerian universities misappropriate research funds. This attitude has banned individuals and institutions class research grants.from accessing world

Sixthly, the issue of low level of research collaboration among library and information science professionals has hurt the quality of researches emanating from the profession. It must be emphasized that LIS professionals must undergo researches with professionals within the country, outside the country, and in other disciplines. Collaboration helps to develop an innovative approach in research by blending different to generate new knowledge. However, most LIS professionals in Nigeria mainly collaborate with professional colleagues within their institutions and country. For instance, the index to journals in Education and Library, Information Science and Technology abstract databases between 2000 and 2018 indicated that 1,106 articles were published. Out of the 1,106 articles analysed, 47.6% were single-authored papers while 52.4% were mainly collaborative research with colleagues within Nigeria (Okeji, 2018).

Seventhly, another challenge in LIS research is the inadequate dissemination of research results.The only way a researcher's contribution to knowledge can be known is by sharing research findings. Ghazali*et al.* (2016) stressed that sharing research results has always been an integral part of academic life and also a major parameter in the research life cycle. Most LIS publications are published through traditional channels such as journals and conference proceedings and are mostly hosted in libraries. These channels are sometimes slow and not accessible. Ngulube (2007) emphasised that many LIS researchers in Africa are not exposed to existing knowledge available in their field because research emanating from the region is not easily available. most Nigerian scholars may be forced to publish to the wrong users due to limited channels for the dissemination of research results.

Conclusion

Research remains an important ingredient in the revitalisation of LIS education in Nigeria. Research leads to the creation of new knowledge, contributes to solving problems facing the profession, improve professionalism, serve as an avenue to generate fund for the development of library schools in Nigeria, and serve as a medium to improve the visibility of the profession. However, challenges such as poor attitude to research by the library and information science educators; poor quality of research; low level of collaborative researches; low level of dissemination of research results; inadequate skills to execute researches; and inadequate access to information resources are impediments to research as a tool in revitalisation of LIS education in Nigeria. There is therefore need for the training and retraining of library and information science educators on innovative research skills.

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