

## Library and Information Technology for National Transformation: Curriculum Building Perspectives in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The traditional mode of service delivery in any profession and particularly librarianship cannot meet up with the contemporary challenges becoming a threat to the practising librarians and library educators. The main constraint identified to be responsible for this weakness is the curriculum. This paper therefore, provided a historical antecedent on Library and Information Science education in Nigeria while the need for effective national transformation through information service provision was stressed. The relevance of information and communication technology (ICT) for an improved information service and programmes was examined using the LIT Department of Federal University of Technology, Minna as a case study. Finally, the paper recommended that all institutions offering LIS programmes should as a matter of urgency revise their curricular to withstand the modern challenges. This is regarded as the first transformational development. In addition, lecturers of LIS are enjoined to embark on re-training for the attainment of the contemporary knowledge and skills in order to improve not only the curriculum but also to enhance the teaching and learning activities in the Library Schools.

### Introduction

Nigeria is one of the developing nations in the world that became independent as far back as 1960. Before the independence Nigeria had been under the colonial rule. As at 1948, it was evident that most of the academic institutions in Nigeria were in existence. This showed that primary, secondary, monotechnic, polytechnic and university institutions were on ground at the instance of the missionaries or colonial government. The missionaries were at the forefront in the establishment of primary and secondary schools while the government paid much attention to the establishment of tertiary institutions.

It is pertinent to note that reading rooms and libraries were also set up along with the establishment of the educational institutions to promote the teaching and learning activities. By 1948, all the various types of libraries, namely; private, school, special, public, and academic libraries were available but not minding their level of development then. However, the major challenge which affected these libraries was in the area of qualified manpower to man them, thus, the need arises. Perhaps, this was why Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) highlighted the followings as reasons for library and information science education in Nigeria:

- i. There were libraries with large buildings and growing collections which required expert management;
- ii. The increase in world population and literacy required more libraries and qualified librarians to man them;
- iii. The nature and role of information in society is changing both in content and container
- iv. Dynamism of knowledge especially in library and information science which required constant education;
- v. Economic and socio-political difference from country to country which are best addressed locally and;
- vi. Complex and scientific nature of library operations which required trained manpower

To address the needs for library and information science education in Nigeria, the Institute of Librarianship was established in 1959 though took off in 1960 at the University College Ibadan, then an affiliate of University of London. Previously, few efforts at training people for librarianship had been made. In this regard, Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) observed that:

Prior to independence, the only method of becoming a librarian in Nigeria, as in other British Commonwealth countries, was by taking the Associate ship of the British Library Association (ALA), either by attending British Library Schools, or by the correspondence courses offered by the British Association of Assistant Librarians or by part-time study. This was the practice after the collapse of the ill-fated regional library training institute, established at Achimota in 1944, to help prepare the first corps of librarians for Nigeria and other Anglophone countries in West Africa...

Presently, Nigeria can boast of several universities and polytechnics running Library and Information Science Programs (OND, HND, /Degree, Master and Ph.D.). The mode of training in most Library Schools in Nigeria is still predominantly traditional and has also influenced the techniques of information service provision in the country. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the traditional training and method of rendering information services cannot withstand the needs of contemporary users, thus, a challenge for a transformation.

### **National Transformation and Information Service Provision**

Transformation has been described by Hornby (2006) as a process of making a complete change from something to something. In other words, it is a means of converting or restructuring of certain efforts or procedures for an improvement. In the context of librarianship and this paper, transformation is regarded as the process of re-engineering the curriculum for a more enhanced national and information services in Nigeria, for a more enhanced national development. A shift from the traditional method of orientation, training and service in librarianship to contemporary yearnings or needs can be referred to as transformation.

Change is a necessity and the most constant phenomenon in any given society. In any profession such as Library Science, transformation is an inevitable challenge that must be adequately addressed in order for the profession to be relevant in the society. Omopupa (2004) stressed that since the human race, from evolution to date has metamorphosed in many ways, services to man should also change to reflect its present place and status in the present society. To this effect, most nations of the world have propounded various transformational programmes as measures of meeting the modern challenges. In Nigeria for instance, the Federal Government has come out with its 2011/2015 transformational agenda. An assessment of the Nigerian transformational agenda revealed low focus on information service delivery but rather a great emphasis was on micro economic framework and economic direction; governance; human capital development policies; programmes and projects; real sector policies, infrastructure policies, (ICT inclusive); distribution of key programmes and projects by sector; enablers for sustainable growth and development; financing and implementation strategies; monitoring and evaluation.

### **National Planning Commission, 2011.**

Contrarily, many developed and developing nations gave prominence to information service provision as a determinant of transforming other sectors in their countries. United States of America, Britain, China, Japan, Brazil to mention but a few are examples of such nations that have successfully transformed through information service delivery. In other words, the most fundamental service that can effectively transform an individual, group, profession or nation for better is information.

In this jet age, information is the most essential commodity for transformational development of a nation. In fact, high level of decision making is usually attained where there is high access to information and its utilization. Okoro and Okoro (2006) considered the growing importance of relevant and speedy information in all aspects of human life as very vital to development. Similarly Ahmed (2011) argued that the ability of an individual or government to anticipate a problem or solution depends on the utilization of accessed information. Furthermore, access to information is described as a necessity and a major factor in the development and empowerment of the citizenry of any society in achieving economic, political and educational success (KirKwood, 2006).

It is imperative however, to note that a country that accord less importance to information accessibility and use is bound to witness a setback and prone to various societal crisis like unemployment, poverty, poor living standards, limited access to social services, etc. Nigeria is a nation with abundant resources, yet it is experiencing under-development in various sectors of the society. Issa (1997) opined that no significant development can be achieved in any society if majority of her citizens are continually exposed to information deprivation. In addition, Ahmed (2011) stated that Japan at a time was in a serious economic condition with high level of poverty rate but decided to give much prominence to its educational and information sectors and this led to improved economy. Japan presently enjoys high level of living standard and has succeeded in ameliorating her unemployment rate to 5.5%. In essence, provision of the right information to the right user, in the right package and at the right time is the best transformational step to national development especially through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

#### **Library and Information technology for National Transformation**

Libraries all over the world have long been regarded as depots or depositories of knowledge and information. The librarians also have played a very significant role as gate-keepers between the world of knowledge and the patrons. The articulation of relevant information resources through a systematic selection, acquisition and organization is the unique function attributed to the librarians. Since the degree of decision making of an individual or group is determined by the level of accessed information, libraries became centres of high patronage in order to satisfy the information needs for both personal and public development. Towards this end, Pessach (2007) opined that:

Libraries' gate-keeping begins with their selection and indexing functions. Librarians are constantly engaged in a discretionary decision-making process, deciding which knowledge to preserve and according to what indexing, and organising knowledge also involves gate-keeping practices.

From time immemorial, information services provision in the libraries have been characterised with the traditional methods. This revealed that all the activities rendered in the libraries to satisfy users are through manual techniques. Since the inception of Library Science profession according to Eke (2012) there has been the notion that librarians are traditional practitioners. Today, it is difficult to satisfy the contemporary needs of users through the traditional device alone. The modern challenges due to the advent of Information and Communication Technology have significantly created the need for transformation in various sectors of the society. Great librarians are emerging and globally announced, owing to the fact that technology is utilized by such librarians for self-marketing and branding of services (Eke, 2012). To be relevant in this society, therefore, the libraries world over must join other sectors in transforming their mode of operations.

Information and Communication Technology has become the most vital tool in any household. In view of speediness, accuracy and reliability, most of the human endeavours such as, e-banking, e-commerce, e-learning, e-conferencing, e-trading and particularly e-library have been transformed electronically. Though, in Nigeria many libraries have made

efforts for computerization of their services but only a few have succeeded to certain extent because of some constraints. Thus, most of the library services in Nigeria are still manually carried out. In this prevailing situation, libraries may lose relevance as the transformed or re-branded users of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may no longer be comfortable with the traditional system of information service delivery. Aina (2013) while narrating the contemporary trends of library services revealed that:

Today Libraries have moved from physical libraries to virtual libraries, where collections are not provided within walls but within computers using digital resources. Libraries have evolved from ancient times when they consisted mainly of clay tablets and papyrus rolls to a situation where they provide public facilities for access to their electronic resources including the Internet

For Nigerian Librarians to compete with their counterparts in the other nations there is a need for the transformation of the manual based information service provision to the electronic technique. The transformation challenge is becoming more inevitable especially these days that certain information resources such as, journals, books, magazines, etc. are both in printed and electronic format. To achieve a significant way forward in this regard, the curricular of the training institutions/ departments in librarianship should be drastically transformed.

#### **Curricular Transformation: case of Library and Information Technology Department, Federal University of Technology, Minna.**

The services to be provided by professional librarians in Nigeria as it is observed in other countries of the world would be determined by the nature of trainings received in the Library Schools. Without any doubt, the quality of services rendered in any given library cannot be better than the quality of the employed staff providing the services. It is in the light of this that the National Policy on Education (2004) affirmed that, "no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers". To produce a qualified and competent personnel and particularly in librarianship, the curriculum has a great role to play.

For the curricular of the Nigerian Library Schools to face the modern challenges, they need to be continuously developed or reviewed. A curriculum of library and information science developed few decades ago will hardly meet the needs of the modern period. The first move to review the curriculum of Library Science profession in Nigeria can be traced to the Institute of Librarianship in University College Ibadan in 1963, when the Carnegie Corporation made a grant of \$112, 000 to the Institute to revise its curriculum to reflect African needs and to introduce its own local diploma programme (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). The initial curriculum was adjudged to be western oriented which had little relevance to the Nigerian peculiarity.

Until recently, the practice of librarians and the mode of operation in libraries in Nigeria like some other developing countries has been traditional. This is actually a reflection of the library school's curriculum which mostly is traditionally based. This shows that librarians can only provide what they obtained during their training. Presently, over-dependence on the skills, knowledge and norms acquired in the course of training a decade or two ago without further training efforts, to render services in a library system is not only a danger but also a threat to one's career. Thus, the curriculum needs an urgent and regular transformation for the purpose of relevance and user satisfaction. To buttress this point further, Ezeani, Eke and Ugwu (2012) asserted that:

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought a lot of dynamism within the Library and Information Science Profession. This has come as a result of the sophisticated nature of the present day library user. Library patrons are constantly prompting librarians to be more pro-active in their service delivery. The advent of the Internet has also compelled librarians to work at providing services in a more dynamic ways.

In view of the foregoing, it is important to deduce that the challenges of the Nigerian librarians and libraries are also observed in the Library Schools. Perhaps, this may be the factor that might have influenced the establishment of a new library school tagged, "Department of Library and Information Technology (LIT)" at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. The new programme was considered and approved by the Senate on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2000 with the Governing Council's ratification on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 but the final approval by the National Universities Commission (NUC) came on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2001. Consequently, the programme commenced during the 2001/2002 academic session (LIT Departmental Students' Handbook 2001-2006).

Though, some Library Schools in Nigeria also made some transformational efforts in form of curriculum building to incorporate the modern trends in librarianship and that of LIT Department of Federal University of Technology, Minna, is unique and a good example. The uniqueness is in the area of Information and Communication Technology courses incorporated into the curriculum and these amounts to over thirty percent (30%) core courses. The mission of the Pioneer Coordinator in this regard was that the products of LIT Department should be capable of providing an improved information service delivery through the use of the modern technology which many products of other Library Schools lack.

Towards a further transformational effort, LIT Department while housed in School of Information and Communication Technology (SICT) of the University was mandated to review its curriculum to incorporate more ICT courses in order to meet up with the new trends in information industry and to facilitate entrepreneurship for self-employment and self-reliance of the departmental products after graduation. The curriculum was thus transformed using a harmonization of course system along with some other departments such as Computer Science, Cyber Security Science and Information and Media Technology in SICT. Some of the ICT courses incorporated to that of Library Science Courses for the undergraduate students in LIT Department are hereby highlighted:

S/N	COURSE CODE	TITLE
1	IMT 111	Introduction to Information theories and Applications
2	IMT 112	Basic Information Technology Tools
3	CPT 111	Computer Science Orientation
4	IMT 123	Web based Technology and Multimedia Applications
5	CPT 121	Introduction to Computer Science
6	CPT 211	Object Oriented Programming
7	CPT 213	Introduction to Computer Systems
8	CPT 214	Computer Architecture
9	LIT 222	Repackaging of Information
10	LIT 223	Information Sources and Communication Media
11	CPT 221	Object Oriented Programming II
12	CPT 222	Data Structure
13	CPT 223	Algorithm
14	LIT 312	Information Technology and Libraries
15	LIT 315	Multimedia Resources and Services
16	CPT 313	Operating System
17	CPT 316	System Analysis and Design
18	CPT 317	Data Communication and Networks
19	LIT 323	Information Searching and Use
20	IMT 326	Web Data Mining
21	CPT 321	Computer Graphics
22	CPT 325	Database Design and Management
23	LIT 413	Introduction to Information Science

24	CPT 413	System Operation Research
25	CPT 416	Software Design and Management
26	LIT 513	Information Retrieval System
27	CPT 519	Computer Installation and Management
28	LIT 522	Library Automation
29	LIT 523	Electronic Publishing Management Systems

The aforementioned courses if well taught with adequate practical exercises can effectively rebrand the potential librarians or Information Scientists to provide a transformed nature of information service that would not only satisfy the information needs of the modern library users but also facilitate national development in Nigeria. (LIT revised curriculum for B.Tech., 2011)

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations.**

Information resources regarded as the fifth factor of production is a ginger that has the ability to transform positively all the various sectors in Nigeria like other nations of the world. The library's primary responsibility is to provide relevant and timely information that can satisfy the needs of community users. The manual technique of information service delivery is gradually losing credence as it cannot withstand the contemporary demands of users, thus, a need for a transformed mode of library operation. However, this cannot be achieved except there is a curriculum transformation especially in Library and Information Science Programmes. The transformational curriculum of the Department of the Library and Information Technology, Federal University of Technology, Minna is chosen as a point of reference.

**For a speedy development drive in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered:**

- Since the curriculum is one of the fundamental factors for any professional development, the Library Schools in the Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria should as a matter of urgency revise their curricular in line with the modern trends for the purpose of relevance. In this regard, the Nigerian Library Association should consolidate its Committee on Curriculum to make constant visits to institutions offering Library and Information Science Programme for a continuous assessment. The NLA should borrow a leaf from other professional bodies such as, NBA, NMA, NSE, etc in the country. Any curriculum found to be grossly inadequate in terms of the contemporary challenges should be sanctioned in the interest of the profession and the nation at large.
- Librarians that have graduated for over a decade need to be constantly trained through professional workshops, conferences and seminars. The traditional knowledge and skills on library operations have less significance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; rather an update knowledge and skills in librarianship are required.
- The Federal Government should give much emphasis on information services provided as observed in other nations of the world to achieve a transformational development through effective decision making.
- To promote effective literacy skills acquisition, the Library Schools should possess a well infrastructured computer laboratory for practical activities. This requires adequate computer systems, space and efficient Internet connectivity.
- The curriculum builders or developers who are academic staff in the Departments of Library and Information Science should go for re-training as they cannot provide

better teaching or trainings than what they had earlier obtained. Therefore, the acquisition of the modern day knowledge and skills of ICT application are very mandatory for them to adequately perform their duties as well as help them in curriculum development.

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