LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE LEARNING AND PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: TRENDS AND ISSUES

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Abstract

The paper discusses the emerging trends in both the profession and practice of modern day librarianship; recognizing that at the core of the information profession today are those saddled with the responsibility of managing the acquisition, organization and dissemination of information to an identifiable group of users. It traces the origin of library and information science education in Nigeria, underscoring the apparent proliferation and its implication. It observes the trend in library and information science practice whereby the advent of new technologies has had a tremendous impact on the traditional service delivery leading to some fundamental issues. These were discussed in relation certain fundamental implications for the Nigerian library schools where future professionals are being trained.

Key words: Librarianship, information science, library development, Nigeria

Introduction

At the core of concept of the “information” are these people who manage the acquisition, organization and dissemination of information to an identifiable group of users. The operation of the knowledge and skills under taken diverse number of work situations. The delivery mechanical and the nature of the dissemination process could vary and need not necessarily be technologically based. Thus, the traditional environment for the information professionals have usually been the library. Regardless of the fact that information is being considered as a cultural and social asset, it is a remarkable development that it is now being purchased at high prices. Consequently, making these enormous libraries and archives available in a dear and organized manner by using the proper technologies in currently the greater challenge for all those involved in knowledge management which comprises the production, organization and transmission of information.

The key to library development any where is personnel while modern librarianship requires personnel with adequate education and training. Although schools had been established in Nigeria as far back as 1842, no thought was given to the establishment of libraries and training of librarians until the second half of the 20th century. This was the twice where modern libraries that were first established in Nigeria as a result of the establishment of research institutes and their libraries had acute staffing problem. Initially these libraries were almost completely manned by expatriated staff with the proliferation of libraries over time, it become apparent that the existing expatiate staff could hardly cope with the management of the growing number of libraries.

Consequently, there was a pressing need to educate and train more indigenous librarians several reasons were advanced for the growing needs to promote library education in Nigeria then. Some of these, as put forward by Ojo-igbinoba (1995) include following:-
The demand for trained and professional librarians.

There were libraries with large building and growing collection, which required expert management.

The increase in word population and literacy required more libraries and qualified librarians to man them.

Trained manpower is required for the complex and scientific nature of library operations.

Trends in Library and Information Science Learning and Practice

Undoubtedly, advances in technology are revolutionizing the world, including information management, business and governance. As a result, information technology (IT) has permeated virtually every aspect of human endeavour to the extend that its effective use can easily make the difference between success and failure. In the word of Mathew (2001) “To by successful in to day's fast changing and highly competitive world, it is vital to use information technology effectively” “having understood the role it plays, tremendous benefits it offers and how to make the best use of its system.

The world is presently witnessing the birth of digital data and communications networks as a major trend in the information market place. With the evolution of digital data and telecommunications networks, the so-called digital revolution has come to bear immensely on socio-economic, cultural as well as developmental transformation of individuals. Institutions, nations and international community (Omkwku, 2001). This is because, as observed by Sabara Traun (1997). “Island and pools of information are being created and generated by big people and business” obviously, the “information of society” Minc (1987) was consequently tenavoidable as the deluge of information was fast gelling out of control.

As against the widely held belief that the library is usually the traditional environment for information professionals information technology has come to challenge that position by introducing new dimensions to the field and its operations. In specific terms Biddiscombe (2001)underscores them very clearly in his remark that:

While requiring a new and more diversified set of skills for individuals,

the internet has also made it impossible to pinpoint a defined space

where information professionals ply their trades. The results of an

information professionals work may need appear in desktops around the

campus, across the company, or further field. The individuals support they
Indeed, to day’s library activities have become more sophisticated and complex due to the proliferation of information sources and the devices for managing information. This the modern library represents a typical reception centre for the assembly of communication of every description. This is because modern societies have become largely dependent on information with their vary existence hinged on the availability, unhindered accessibility as well as intelligent use of information. Aliyu and Isa (2003) remark that the advent of technology has come to change the way information is gathered, processed and communicated to the end users.

Indeed the raise of information technology has been described as the single most important technological development of the 20th century. It has revolutionized almost every aspect of modern live in as diverse areas as stockholding, banking, publishing and personal communication (Ogradelibrary, 2003) particularly in the developed nation, electronic data exchange has now become a standard of method in information management. Information technology now direct infact of human behavior as well as on human resource development in organizations. Managers of business firms and other organizations, for example, need information in order to make operational decisions independent of headquarters staff experts. To achieve this effective and effectively there most exist the means and tools for making it really available and accessible.

Similarly, Vasenin (1996) underscores this when he state that “Information technologies of internet using audio, video and hypertext, provide for scientists, lecturers and students access to non-traditional source of information at any point of the globe as well as to the means of data presentation and manipulations “Consequently, libraries have enjoyed improved services and higher productivity through the use of computers. The computer performs different functions relating to information processing, storage and retrieval. No wonder that productive computer based activity has been referred to as information technology (Okeinji, 2001).

Issue in Library and Information Science Learning and Practice

One most visible trend in the learning and practice of librarianship today is the introduction of new information technology as evidenced by the number of libraries and other information centres that have gone automated. Automation however, has become an increasingly divergent issue, in terms of resources, skills, and abilities over the past few years, library automation has undergone a dramatic shift in direction. Library automation began with the in-house processing of traditional tasks and grew to include the use of computing telecommunications tools. Now there is a “library without walls” which uses technology to expand services, resources and relationship between libraries and resources around the world “virtual library” is reality.

A World of Digital Information in just a Keystroke away claim IBM Digital Library

IBM Digital library provides tools to store and transfer information between individuals and organization to those who create and distribute intelligence. Automated data storage and fast data access and better data availability for users can be found in the new scalable library Architecture (SLA) family of advanced automated data libraries from Automated Data libraries. Storage Tek
Offers Information Storage for libraries through Enterprise Storage Software and automated cartridge system library software. The hardware improvement bring about the physical reality of digital libraries.

Digital libraries necessitate a move toward automation, in that to get access to the library resource a user has to have access to a networked computer. The future of library automation system will include information kiosks, where people with no computer experience can access information easily. Information scientists will create the human computer interfaces and library scientists will manage the resources. The US postal services will develop interactive kiosks to provide 24-hours electronic access to government services. Current trends in library automation reflect the dynamic nature of library automation. This trend will continue to change and evolve in the future.

Thus, change is not longer a one-time event to be, at one time, complete. Once beginning the change process, librarians will never again know the kind of secure stability experience in the past. Change of role, function, people and technology will provide a rolling environment, an exacting, emerging and exhausting place to be. A significant aspect of techno stress is the fear technology bring to some that there will be changing duties and responsibilities in the workplace, that one's position might one day be not just changed but even eliminated and that the very culture of the professional could be changing.

Many libraries fear that automation would alter their position in the library, creating new duties and possibly a loss of status in the employee hierarchy. Full automation will cause organizational and procedural changes to the library. Traditional boundaries between the various department will disappear. With the advent of computer-assisted bibliographic instruction there will probably be the need for fewer librarians for on-line searching and general reference, or for orientation and instruction.

Another interesting aspect of these organizational shifts closely associates with the issue of gender technology, which is often associated in our culture with men, brought many power issues relating to gender into libraries. By reinforcing the power of those librarians who had technological expertise, the automation of libraries also disproportionately increase the status of many men in the library workplace. As well, many librarians feared suffering as a result of automation. Users, they felt, were viewing librarians more and more to be merely equipment technician - - and search system experts”. As Automation unfolded, many librarians also began to experience longer working houses, as the tools needed to complete office duties become more mobile.

Another worry many librarians was the possible loss of interpersonal communication in their libraries, as many feared that the libraries would become less human as patrons twined to computers instead of professionals for information. Hence library workers to day find that electronic mail systems, automated workstations and the intense concentration required by the terminal itself can indeed, produce an altered state. By and large, automation of libraries has come to represent the “pessimist’s worst fear and the optimist’s great hope”.

Implication of the Trends and Issues for Library and Information Science Education

From the foregoing, the far-reaching implications and challenges that the present information technology (IT) environment holds for the library and information professionals have been clearly...
and distinctly brought to the force. A variety of changes have come to affect and shape the present library environments. Such changes have manifested in the forms of “users need; information resources and communication technology” (Sangal, 1995). These have necessitated the re-appraisal of library education and training in all its ramifications. This was with a view to attaining the required capacity building through the production of modern information professional who are capable of exploiting “new information technology infrastructure to serve as teacher of users, information counselors, intermediaries, facilitators and information brokers” (Wali and Adimorah 1998).

In other words, this universal trend has immense implications for professional programmes concerned with the education and training for library and information management. This issues relate to the recognition of increasingly diversified information field in which librarians can no longer claim a monopoly. This is simply for the fact that professionals who are adept at the applications of the new technology are controlling the emerging field. Constantly accomplish this mission; however, trained and managerial ability are required. In other words such caliber of staff would be needed as could design and operate systems relating to the collection, dissemination and interpretation of information with their accompanying technologies.

Therefore, library schools are now expected to train modern information professional who are adept to utilizing new technologies in value-added economy in other words, the effective management of complex resources are to be found in modern day libraries. Requires a new breed of professionals who are committed to understanding the information age in which we live and helping people and organizations control information flow through the new technologies.

The implications of the foregoing led to a situation whereby changes in current circulation of library schools become imperative more importantly, future curricular are expected to be constructed in such manners as to accommodate programmes that will equip graduates professional with the knowledge, skill and techniques to acquire, organized and disseminate information according to the new demands in the information markets. Therefore, to ensure survive in the age of “information revolution”, training of librarians in the handling of information technology (IT) is a key priority Mahmood (1997).

Otherwise, there remains only a faint hope for graduates who would be able to cope with the first-changing field of library technical service which have incorporated “computer cooperative acquisition, cataloging and preservation programmes, bibliographic utilities, vendor serve, local wide area network and other emerging technology” (Younger, 1997).

Conclusion

All these emerging operational realities, undoubtedly skilled support staff and highly educated professional librarians. This is because the introduction of information technology (IT) has not only allowed for new, easy and better operations carrying out a number of library operations but that retro-active services have consequently been displaced by new pro-active services. To this end, both the present and future librarians should be able to exploit the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for modern library practice. Only then, can they be able to have electronic library
services that are currently dominating the world of information storage, processing retrieval and dissemination.

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