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Personnel Issues in Academic Libraries in Nigeria: The College of Education Perspective

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Abstract:

This paper is theoretical and mostly based on the author's practical experience as a College Librarian for eight years. The paper examines personnel opportunities, services and social environment of librarians in colleges of education libraries. It observed obvious gaps in training and skill requirements/needs of librarians in line with the new digital age as well as discrepancies in conditions of service in terms of remunerations and staff progression among others. The implication of inadequate, ill-equipped and unmotivated staff on library service are critical. For effective service delivery, it includes by recommending that librarians capacities must be retrained, developed and motivated to keep abreast with new trends.

Keywords: Personnel issues, librarians, colleges of education, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The key academic libraries in Nigeria are libraries attachment to universities, mono/polytechnics, Colleges of education and other research related institutions. There are 20 federal, 42 states, 21 private colleges of education and two other institutions offering NCE certificate in Nigeria (NCCE, Abuja;2007) All these have established permanent or temporary libraries attached to them and recruit or hire library personnel.

Personnel factor is very critical and fundamental to the success of library information services delivery. This is because human beings articulate and activate other activities. They act as a catalyst not only to acquire, organize and preserve information resources but also serve as a vital bridge and a gatekeeper for the dissemination and utilization of knowledge in all its ramifications. A well trained, educated and motivated personnel is necessary for the utilization her skills for the ultimate attainment of all institutional goals.

2. The College Library Personnel

By convention, three categories of personnel exist in libraries. The professional librarians, the paraprofessionals and administrative support staff comprising of administrative/executive officers, finance officers, computer operators/typists, porters and cleaners etc. Aina (2004) observed that support staff, constitute the largest workforce of library organizations. Our concern in this discussion is centered on professional librarians.

Professional librarians are responsible for coordinating and giving direction to all services provided by libraries to achieve the college's objective and functions of teaching, learning and research. Their key functions include – acquisition, organization (cataloguing and classification), reader/reference services and giving bibliographic instruction to students and other library users.

These professionals are trained and hold diplomas, degrees or post-graduate certificates in library and information science or studies from universities and accredited institutions. Professional librarians are expected to be academic members of the College/institution and as such should have an intellectual approach to the exercise of their duties and responsibilities. As academic staff, they are also expected to fulfill all conditions of teaching, researching and publishing as a pre-condition for promotion at all levels in addition to the routine of library services. Wawire & Messah (2010) argue that a well-trained body of people tends to imbue each other with confidence they need to tackle the jobs demanded of them since it is through it that library users and information materials interact resulting in quality services. Competent library staff with requisite needed skills in line with developments in the profession are needed to give direction and vitality to service it provides

3. Contenting Personnel Issues in Academic Library Services Vis-À-Vis College Libraries in Nigeria

Technology, Innovation and Change.

Academic libraries especially Nigeria today face two major threats; a global digital environment and competition given the flexibility of online/virtual services and remote access to information resource through the use of internet, multimedia and social network services. Changes in methods of teaching, learning, behaviour and information seeking methods has influenced and enabled by technology as remarked by McCarthy (2005) have impacted on academic libraries.

Today, the internet, digital technologies and other networked web-based resources have highly impacted on how students, scholars and other people find and access information (virtual/online resources). Library and information personnel in academic libraries work in a constantly changing networked environment. As technologies change library operations are also changing and library personnel too must change to adapt to new plans, tasks and activities. For us especially in developing countries we are at the crossroad of not only imbibing new technological change but also face the reality of still serving the needs of patrons who still rely more on traditional resources.

Today the only way of meeting and satisfying users' demands is the use of ICT in information service delivery. Librarians and libraries must do this to remain relevant. Owoyemi (2001) contends that to ensure our relevance to a new generation of users, "We need to be where our users are, even if they are not inside our libraries". Globally, the trend now is that information provision and delivery is shifting from traditional models to electronic and web-based format. Consequently Hayes (1998) rightly opined that libraries must "move from resource centered, institutionalized and physically bound to network based." This change has obvious implications on library personnel. Youngok (2006) stressed the need for the development and acquisition of new skills and competencies while Mallapur and Naik (2009) raise the following critical questions.

1. How do librarians working in academic and research libraries react to these technological changes?
2. What are their perceptions, beliefs and opinions regarding the implications of technologies in the work environment and
3. What are the psychological, personal and organizational issues that they encounter?

Studies and researches on the above are ongoing. While in their various surveys conducted by Adomi and Anie (2006), Ademodi and Adepoju (2009) and Fadehen and Ali (2010) reveal limited computer, poor computer skills and lack of readiness of academic institutions libraries to face the execution of digital library project. Ekoja (2012) in his paper commended efforts by libraries that are making modest efforts to embrace ICTS in their libraries.

4. Recruitment and Staffing

The NCCE provides guides for the recruitment and staffing of College of Education libraries. The guide stipulates the minimum number of professionals to be employed in relation to para-professional, number of support staff, ratio of students' population and collection size of the library. These are supposed to be increased as both the students' population, size of the collection and facilities expand. It equally provides job specification and other conditions of services as they relate to staff progression and promotions.

In practice, these documents only exist in policy and not practice. Wawire and Messah (2010) observed that most public universities in Kenya do not appreciate the role of professional librarians and so never give privilege to librarians when it comes to adequate professional staff. This situation can be akin to what happens in Nigerian universities nay Colleges of education too. Unfortunately also many universities and colleges of education administrators see the library profession as an all comers' affairs and so recruit and send all sorts of staff to the library without regard to professional certification.

Onifade and Onifade (2011) in their survey of staffing patterns of state Colleges of Education in Nigeria, found that:

1. most Colleges of Education libraries were grossly understaffed;
2. The libraries lacked professional librarian and
3. That para-professional and non-professionals predominated the staff in these Colleges of Education.

Shortage of personnel does not only have adverse effect on the quality of library services but also has a detrimental consequence on professional librarians because it denies them the chance to perform purely professional duties and research assignments which are essential for their academic and professional development. It is not unusual to find all calibres of individuals cutting across disciplines that wittingly or unwittingly are named or designated as librarians, librarians in training with no clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This category of library staff accept library jobs as stepping stones waiting for better opportunities and offers and quit the library at any given offer.

5. Education, Training and Dearth of Core Professionals

Library and information science (LIS) is a growing and relatively new discipline in Nigeria. For now less than 21% of Nigerian universities offer programme of study in LIS. For now the pool from which core professionals are to be drawn is low.

As a new discipline, core issues here border on

1. crises of nomenclature of certificates/degrees offered;
2. variance of content/programmes offered by individual institutions and
3. Where to locate the department within faculties and school.

Igun (2006) argues that the 21st century library is synonymous with digital library services. Therefore to have an edge in this era, digital education has become indispensable. Chiware (2007), Fadehan (2009) and Rahman, Khatun & Islam (2008) in their various surveys of training of librarians in African Universities and Bangladesh opined that these institutions lacked or were ill-prepared to face the execution of digital library services. They revealed that majority of these institutions lacked well equipped computers/laboratories for students and that professional status of staff was also low.

Chikonso (2013) assess the changing needs of information professional training in Zimbabwe and summarized key issues and common trends that generally affect training of critical professionals. He observed that:

- Most library schools are still inadequate in terms of standards and quality to meet the high intake for higher education;
- Lack of adequate LIS educators especially at the higher levels in the field of ICT and IT based skills;
- Poor technology infrastructure in LIS schools;

- Despite the need for continuing education, continuing education for LIS educators is problematic because, either the programmes are not always readily available or if available, they are not affordable;
- Institutions due to lack of funds rarely sponsor staff training;
- Professionals churn out from schools are ill-prepared to cope with current ICT based information services.

The point that is being stressed here is that it is these universities/LIS schools that train personnel for itself and colleges of education. Any form of dysfunctional training from these institutions will obviously have ripple down effect on college personnel from where most significant staff are trained. Most professional trained are ill-equipped for fit into the new jobs/roles expected of them. It is apparent that three categories of professionals are common in our system:

1. The old and analogue school – those trained in traditional library systems of the early 70 – 80s when computers had not started making any marks;
2. The middle school – those caught between the web of emerging computer/hybrid system struggling to keep in tune with the times;
3. The emerging or new school – digital librarians.

The third group are faced with the reality of the times and do not have any options but to take steps take the bull by the horn by training in relevant computer/ICT. There seems to be a phobia from the first and second on embracing ICT in libraries while the third are making in roots or breaking grounds in keeping abreast with new skills.

Ocholla and Bothma (2007) have rightly noted that the component of ICTS in LIS programme in Africa today cannot be avoided but should include courses in computer literacy, ICT, hard/software databases, information systems and system development. The IFLA/ALP workshop recommend areas that are considered necessary to include in ICT integration in LIS programmes. Some of the basics include:-

- Knowledge and evaluation of software, hardware, operating system and installation of software;
- Word processing, spreadsheet, graphic presentations;
- Web browsing and internet searching;
- Computing joint databases and publishing databases in the internet;
- Data analysis with statistical technologies;
- ML coding – advanced level (library portals) and
- Creating of local content through digital libraries and institutional repositories.

6. Funding of Libraries

Since the down turn of our economy from the middle 90s to-date, there has been continuing crises in the funding of education and its infrastructure. The continuous fall in oil prices and global recession has seriously affected library development funds at all levels. Continuous cuts in library budgets and lack of funds have adverse consequences on employment, training and development of library personnel. Cuts in budgets and lack of funds are affecting most colleges' ability to offer good remuneration packages and build capacities and provide needed training for staff.

The quality, adequacy and development of human resources personnel in libraries are dependent on the funds they receive from their proprietary authorities for staff recruitment, training and continuous capacity building/development. Hisle (2002) in his discourse on issues facing academic librarians lamented that fewer librarians are entering the profession as a whole and fewer still in academic library field. That how to ensure the education of new librarians and re-educating existing ones with skills and knowledge to support roles in a digital age especially roles involving teaching and library promotion are a challenge for the profession. He further observed that academic libraries in developing continues depend mainly on government funding and do not have organized fund raising programmes to generate extra fund to sustain their services. Edoka (2001) and Lawal (2002) on their part decry arbitrary cuts in library budgets from their institutional heads on the basis of internally established priorities and competitions from other departments. In general, studies and surveys by scholars reveal that libraries in Nigeria operate in a resource constrained environment noting that this limits their capacity not only to acquire resources and provide services but also to employ and develop personnel. (Aguolu & Aguolu 2002, Ajibero, 2003, Medu 2008 and Asuolu, 2013).

7. Marginalization of Librarians

Shen (2013) observed that the status, payment and development of librarians in universities and colleges are not given enough importance neither is their functions recognized. He further noted that highly skilled and qualified people employed in the library hardly last there as they often run away at any given opportunity. More so, he explained that the library's function in the social environment is questioned. The library is not considered as a first-line department, but most often as a supplementary department, compared with those core departments (e.g. departments that carry out teaching).

8. Inequality in the Environment Conditions of Service and Motivation

Wide disparities exist between federal, state and privately owned colleges of education in Nigeria. Some state colleges of education are yet to implement 65 years retirement age for academic staff especially for their librarians neither do they pay recommended academic staff allowances and wages.

It is unfortunately observable that the tendency to undermine the status and position of college librarians is given effect and accentuated by grandiose discriminatory policies of some governing council/governments. For instance in the edict establishing Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, despite the fact that the College Librarian's office is tenured, the salary and emolument of the office are not consolidated. Again despite the fact that the College Librarian is a principal officer of the College, he is not a member of the College governing Council but only attend Council meeting as a member "In Attendance".

He is a nominal member and this has a tendency of not only diminishing the status of the librarian but erodes his powers to authoritatively pursue issues critical to library matters. Also related to the above is the challenge Ekoja (2012) describe as decreased influence of librarians in tertiary institutions especially as principal officers. He stated that many librarians in tertiary institutions no longer have the clout of their predecessors who wielded a lot of influence due to inability to fit in rightly or otherwise into the politics of their parent institutions.

9. Attitudinal Factor

There exist within most institutions a relationship between some top management/administrators, faculty and staff and librarians which can either be described as contemptuous or ignorant of the roles librarians and libraries play in academic institutions. There is a tendency to reduce or compare the library/librarians to mere bookstore/bookkeepers. They see the job of librarians as rudimentary and just for anyone. This problem is compounded by the caliber of uncommitted people who are most often wrongly recruited into the library profession by mere chance and not by choice.

Public opinion of libraries/librarians is low as some jokingly or mockingly refer to librarians and call them names such as "man of books" book people/book keepers. In general, the reading culture of the country is still low and neither do we have value for libraries. Library and information services are intangible in nature. These cannot be qualified and quantified in concrete or pecuniary terms. Hardly are libraries appreciated, valued or recognized. This often account for their relegation since Nigerian place a lot of premium on money and material value that cannot readily be seen in libraries

10. Status of Academic Librarian in Some Institutions

In 2015, NLA AGM/Conference during the sections meeting of Academic and Research Library section (ARLS) some of the following issues that challenge the status of academic libraries in most colleges of education, polytechnic and universities raise were:-

- That there was discrimination in the payment of some remunerations such as "excess work load" o librarians since there was no definite formula as student/teacher ratio to calculate excess load;
- That despite the circulars from NUC, NCCE or NBTE which classify librarians as academic staff, some managements and staff in these institutions still narrow the term "academic staff" to core teaching staff/departments only, especially when it comes to payment of certain allowances;
- In some colleges the retirement age of 65 years for academic staff is restricted to lecture or core teaching staff;
- The career progression of librarians terminates at deputy librarian level if they are not lucky to be appointed college librarians;
- The overall consequences of the above is that these often lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, tension, labour unrest, lack of commitment and pullouts.

11. Critical Concerns in Academic Libraries Personnel Matters

Arising from our discussion, the following concerns may be raised

- Are there institutional policies to tackle personnel issues in libraries?
- What are the perceptions of professionals in the field?
- What strategies are information professionals using to fight this course or reverse the action?
- Are there institutional policies to cope with change?
- Are there provisions to develop capacities and skills to drive technology and change process?
- How can appropriate personnel be mobilized to drive the change process?

These are what require holistic and collaboration efforts of government, chief executives of institutions, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).

12. The Way Forward

There may be too many questions than answers. However the following modest efforts aimed at resolving the problems are commendable.

- Ongoing efforts by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Nigeria Library Association of Nigeria (NLA) and Librarians' Registration Council (LRCN) at reviewing, harmonizing and developing curricula and condition of practice for professionals in the country is welcome;
- Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) annual special grant to academic libraries for library development should not only be sustained but improved;
- In specific terms, the NCCE 2015 Revised condition of service has adequately addressed the issue of stagnation of promotion of librarians at deputy level. Now the position of Principal Librarian replaces the deputy librarian, like the lecturer cadre

making it possible for the librarian to move to chief librarian as is the case with chief lecturer. The position of College Librarian remains appointive;

- Personnel play a very critical role in the acquisition processing and dissemination of library services to users. There is need for well-articulated programmes to adequately train staff to meet the challenges of the digital age. Training should be both formal and continuing especially in IT based skills;
- Proper remuneration, good working environment and more attractive conditions of service should be provided;
- There are growing opportunities for LIS professional trainings and retraining in the increasing number of universities and polytechnics in library and information science or technologies offered right from certificate, diploma, and degree up to doctorate (Ph.D) levels. There are also increasing and regular workshop, seminars and conferences organized by professional bodies and associations like Nigeria Library Associations (NLA) and its various sections – ARLS, NALISE, AWLIN and IT section etc. and LRCN. These can be explored and utilized to develop personnel in libraries;
- Adequate ICT infrastructures/facilities equipment such as well-furnished internet laboratories with modern tools for providing digital service must be provided in LIS schools/Departments;
- There is need to enlist the goodwill of governments and institutional managements in the promotion of the library personnel development and welfare and
- Adequate funding of library programmes especially training of librarians in IT skills.

13. Conclusion

The new digital age has come with new challenges and opportunities to both libraries services and the profession. Library professionals must adequately be developed, trained and retrained to keep pace with technology innovation and change. Personnel development and welfare must be given the needed attention to keep up with the changing roles.

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