Development of Library and Information Science Education in South-East Nigeria: Trends, Challenges and way forward

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Abstract

This paper investigated the development of Library and Information Science Education in South-East, Nigeria: Trends, challenges and way forward. The study is a qualitative survey based on literature review. Various definitions of Library and Information Science (LIS) Education from different scholars were examined. Research articles on the establishment of Librarianship education in Nigeria and in various institutions particularly in South-East were reviewed. The development of LIS education in South-East, Nigeria is not without its attendant challenges. An intentional observation of the researchers as librarians and intensive interactions with undergraduate students of Library and Information Science showed that few students are not knowledgeable of the emerging trends in their field of study. This is rather expected given that theoretical knowledge acquired about the discipline in the society falls short of what is needed in an emerging economy. The challenges that have marked the developments of LIS education in South-East, Nigeria are not insurmountable. However, the collaborative efforts of the relevant stakeholders in the LIS community can bring about a sustainable solution to the development of LIS education in South-East. Hence, the recommended approaches suggested which covers LIS students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills. It is expected of university administrators to organize workshops and seminars that would ensure that Library Science Practitioners in the library are taught the use of ICT for collection development in line with global trend of librarianship.

Keywords: Library and Information Science Education, Librarianship, Development, Trends, South-East

Introduction

Library and Information Science (LIS) education plays a pivotal role in shaping professionals equipped to navigate the increasing surge of information generation, management, dissemination, and access. It is also a known fact that Library and Information Science (LIS) education is the specialized formal training for librarians to acquire skills and competencies necessary for library services and transfer of knowledge. Omehia (2019) is of the view that library education as a field of study equips learners with information acquisition, classification, manipulation, storage, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of acquired skills to the students. He further stated that library education also aids learners with competencies that enhance transfer of information literacy skills to them.

Library education contextually, is a professional programme designed to prepare students for a degree in LIS. Although library education can be acquired from colleges of education and polytechnics, Onuoha, Ukachi and Ania (2016) noted that the products of such schools are not recognized as professional librarians. Only a first degree from a university is accepted as the foundation for professional training in Nigeria. However, Library officers are agitating for inclusion of HND holders which has not gained approval from Librarians Registration Council of Nigerian(LRCN). Library and Information Science is regulated by National University Commission (NUC) as well as Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).LRCN (2019) is saddled with the responsibility of determining the level of knowledge and skills required to be a librarian while setting and maintaining standards for all categories of libraries within the LIS profession.

It is instructive to note that NUC and LRCN are committed to the funding of curriculum reviews while applying quality assurance procedures in the administration of the university educational system (Onwubiko, 2020). All LIS education and training programmes in the SE Nigeria use a common curriculum, developed in collaboration with faculty and department as spelt out by NUC; the body that has the mandate to accredit programmes in any Nigerian university. This paper, therefore, aimed to examine the developments in LIS of federal and state universities in South-East Nigeria; comprising five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

Development of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria

The history of Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria could be traced back to the UNESCO seminar held at Ibadan in 1953 as observed by Abubakar (2010), Abubakar (2021), Onuoha et al. (2016) and Saka (2015). This seminar on the development of public libraries in Africa recommended the establishment of a limited number of library schools and was considered as the foundation stone for library education and training in Nigeria. Prior to the 1953 Seminar, training for library profession was mostly done abroad. Thereafter, library schools were established in some institutions of higher learning.

The first Library and Information Science school was established at the University College, Ibadan with the assistance of the Carnegie Corporation of New York as an outcome of Harold Lancour's recommendation (Abubakar 2010). The first batch of students were admitted in 1960 for postgraduate diploma and master's degree at the then Institute of Librarianship now

known as the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies in the Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan (Abubakar, 2021;Saka, 2015). Carnegie Corporations sponsored a study on "Library needs for Northern Nigeria" and the report recommended that a library school be established in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The library school was established in 1968 according to Alhassan and Ahmed (2015), Onuoha etal (2016), Saka and Abdullahi (2007) with the aim of educating and training librarians at the undergraduate level in contrast to that of the University of Ibadan's postgraduate programme. However, with the establishment of more universities in Nigeria and the growing awareness of the importance of libraries in national development, made the need for more library schools become obvious. The library schools needed to produce librarians who will in turn provide professional services in the libraries that were established in the universities as well as LIS educators to teach in the library schools in accordance with the provisions of the National Universities Commission(NUC).

National Universities Commission, an agency saddled with the responsibility of regulating academic programmes in Nigerian universities, indicated its functions in universities in Nigeria to include: grants approval for all academic programmes run in Nigerian universities; grants approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes in Nigerian universities; ensures quality assurance of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities; and serves as a channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities.(NUC, 2020).In addition to these functions which cover all disciplines, the field of Library and Information Science also has a regulating body that is saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring good and ethical practice, and the body is known and referred to as Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).

Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), which was set up to ensure high standards of professionalism and practice of the Library and Information Science profession has the following functions directed towards the development of LIS: pursues the attainment of professional excellence by determining who are librarians; sets standards of knowledge and skills required for registration and practice; sets guidelines for accreditation and minimum standards for libraries, and ensures the maintenance of professional discipline among librarians. (LRCN, 2019).

Development of LIS Education in South-East, Nigeria

LIS education had its debut in South-East, Nigeria in 1983 when the Department of Library Sciences, as it was known at inception, was created in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a response to repeated calls for more training opportunities for LIS professionals in the region. The foundation class of 18 undergraduate students graduated in 1987. Ever since, the department has experienced exponential growth with current undergraduate enrolment averaging 90-120 students in each academic level. The undergraduate program of the department of LIS obtained full accreditation from NUC in 1999, 2006, 2014 while progressively it got full accreditation every five years . The department offers a Bachelor's Degree in LIS. The undergraduate programme is fashioned after the NUC minimum academic standards for LIS developed in 1999.This spelt out core and elective courses in LIS, as well as a number of cognate courses in other disciplines. In 1995 the department witnessed the introduction of postgraduate programmes which featured MLIS and Ph.D. degrees in LIS. It further introduced a Post Graduate Diploma programme for those with first degrees in other disciplines who sought to pursue a higher degree in LIS. Moreover, the department offers Diploma and BLIS courses in sandwich programme.

LIS as an academic discipline in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state started in the then Anambra state University of Science and Technology (ASUTEC) in 1986. It was then a B.Ed. programme for upgrading the National Certificate in Education (NCE) and University of Ibadan diploma graduates who combined LIS with a teaching subject in the course of training and education. It operated as one of the sub-units in the department of Educational Foundations, in the faculty of Education. The academic programme/ curriculum consisted of three parts: Core education courses, librarianship and teaching subjects. The programme was available to regular, sandwich and continuing education students. Overtime, it was realized that the programme was meeting the needs of school libraries only because of its restrictive content and emphasis. Pressures from Nigeria Library Association (NLA), Librarians' Registration Council (LRCN) and empowerment of the National University Commission (NUC) resulted in the dropping of the B.Ed. programme and subsequent replacement with Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) in 2005 (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2021).

On the other hand,Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, under the leadership of Prof. Hillary Edeoga made history in November, 2012 when it gave admission to its first set of students into the newly-introduced programme in Library and Information Science (LIS) after obtaining approval from NUC in 2011 (Michael Okpara University, 2014). Thus, it became the first agriculture-based university to successfully establish a library school and mount a degree programme in Library and Information Science. The department is presently domiciled in the College of Agricultural and Science Education (CASE). The curriculum has been designed in line with the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for the award of a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science (BLIS).

The department of Library and Information Science of Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) has the same origin with the programme of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. It began as a B.Ed. course of study and as an option in the Educational Foundations department. Department of Library and Information Science was established in 2015 (ESUT, nd). The department is presently domiciled in the Faculty of Education of the University. The philosophy of LIS in ESUT is the production of competent and dedicated library/information scientists who are ICT compliant and with an academic subject area background, to provide adequate professional services to professional colleagues in that specific area of knowledge.

In Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, the Department of Library and Information Science was established in 2019 for the award of a degree of Bachelor of library and Information Science (BLIS). It is one of the departments in the faculty of Education (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,2021). More so, the department is committed to the production of world class LIS professionals who are adequately equipped with the skills and disposition for excellence in information service delivery.

The request for the establishment of Department of Library and Information Science of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki was made in 2018 while the approval for its commencement was granted in 2020 by NUC. The department is domiciled in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities It is reported that LIS department in Ebonyi State University has a huge influence on the educational, technological, economic and cultural progress of the people of the State (Ebonyi State University, 2020).

The department of Library and Information Science of Abia State University, Uturu was one of the foundation programmes established by the then Imo State University, Etiti in 1981. The department changed its name from library studies to Library and Information Science in the

2000/2001 academic session in response to changes in the profession (Abia State University, Uturu, Department of Library and Information Science, Student handbook for Undergraduate programme, 2017).In 2001/2002 academic session, the university changed from the collegiate to faculty system. Consequently, the name of the department changed from Library Studies Unit to Department of Library and Information Science in the MJC Echeruo Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (having been named after the first Vice Chancellor, a Professor of English language, Prof. MMJC Echeruo (Abia State University, 2017). In 1985, the department graduated her first batch of 19 graduates with a Bachelor of Library Studies (BLS) .

The history of Library and Information Science in Imo State University, Owerri is traced to Imo State University which existed in Etiti from which the former Abia State University was crafted. In the wake of the creation of Abia State from Imo State in 1991, a new Imo State University was established in Owerri in 1992 while the old Imo State University was renamed as Abia State University in consideration that it was located at Uturu, which fell under Abia State. The Library and Information Science programme began during the 1993/94 academic session with the admission of 55 undergraduate students (Imo State University, 2022).The department was originally situated in Faculty of Social Sciences and was known as Library Science Unit in line with the collegiate system which operated in the university. However, with the adoption of the Faculty system by the university in 2002, the name has changed to the Department of Library and Information Science while it was transferred to Faculty of Education in 2012 in line with NUC's prescription.

Challenges to the Development of LIS Education in South-East, Nigeria

The development of LIS education in South-East, Nigeria is not without its attendant challenges. Observation by the researchers (who are librarians), intensive interactions and engagements with undergraduate students of library and information science showed that students are not ignorant or unaware of the emerging trends in their field of study. This may not be separated from the fact that the teaching-learning processes in the universities in South-East, Nigeria gives prominence to theory while relegating practice of what is learnt to the background. This, to all intents and purposes, has contributed to the rising unemployment among graduates of LIS. This is rather expected given that theoretical knowledge acquired falls short of the realities of the needs of the society and an emerging economy. Onwubiko (2020) identified improper teaching methods, deficit of educational infrastructure and equipment; dearth of lectures on emerging topics in line with global trends in Information and Communication Technology and poor evaluation methods of students as some of the challenges to the development of LIS education in South-East, Nigeria.

Moreover, there is the challenge posed by infrastructural decay and shortfall of modern facilities for the training of modern day librarians who are digital natives as obtained in advanced climes. This apparently, presents a widening gap in providing a synergy between meeting the needs of society and LIS education. This could be blamed on poor government's investment in LIS. However, even when innovative resources and facilities are provided, the attitude of librarians get in the way of their use, given that a good number of them have become so accustomed to the archaic use of lecture methods to drive home lectures without recourse to the use of innovative resources and facilities in line with global trends. The consequence of the aforementioned challenges, is the churning out of graduates of LIS who are not attuned with global trends in librarianship.

Way forward

The challenges that have marked the development of LIS education in South-East, Nigeria are not insurmountable. The collaborative efforts of the relevant stakeholders in the university community can bring about a sustainable solution to the development of LIS education. Thus, Adebayo and Alex-Nmacha (2018) recommended unified ways of teaching and evaluation that takes cognizance of LIS students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills. More so, NUC as well as LRCN should collaborate to ensure quality assurance of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities. University administrators should organize workshops and seminars that would ensure that librarians are taught the use of ICT for library operations related to information resources and services provision, in line with global trends in librarianship. On this note, Katuli-Munyoro and Mutula (2017) suggested that LIS professionals' competencies and skills must evolve continuously in order to remain relevant in the contemporary world. Lastly, government should provide sufficient funds for the purchase of appropriate infrastructure and facilities that will aid LIS education in South-East Nigeria in the ever-changing paradigm landscape of librarianship.

Conclusion

The establishment of Library and Information Science Departments in various Higher Education Institutions in South-East, Nigeria did not occur at the same time rather each was established based on the needs and preparedness of each institution .Many other institutions have instituted library and information science especially among private universities The programmes have continues to grow in terms of its curriculum which emphasizes the inclusion of ICT based courses ,robotics and artificial intelligence. Moreover the skills sets needed by librarians have continued to grow and expand to include personal and interpersonal skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, information literacy skills, ICT skills, management skills and project management skills. The implication of all these is the fact that all hands should be on deck as all the stakeholders, university management, lecturers, librarians and students optimize their inputs to ensure the sustenance of lis programmes in line with international best practices that align with current trends, innovations and research. This will greatly enhance the education and training of prospective LIS professionals and make the programme attractive.

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