

**DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTENANCE OF INTEREST IN LIBRARY PROFESSION IN AKWA IBOM STATE: AN ANNIVERSARY LECTURE PRESENTED BY PROFESSOR AHIAOMA IBEGWAM, UNIVERSITY OF UYO LIBRARIAN DURING THE NLA AKWA IBOM STATE GOLDEN JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS AT TETFUND LECTURE THEATRE, UNIVERSITY OF UYO MAIN CAMPUS ON 5<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2017.**

**INTRODUCTION**

*Development* is a noun that describes the act or process of growing or causing something to grow or become larger or more advanced. It was first used in 1756 and has the following synonyms, elaboration, evolution, expansion, growth, progress and progression. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary on-line dictionary) on the other hand, *Sustenance* is a noun for something that keeps someone or something alive e.g. food, water, air etc.

*Interest* is a noun for a feeling of wanting to learn more about something or to be involved in something.

*Library science* is the study or the principle and proud of library care and administration first used in 1904.

*Profession* is a noun for a type of job that requires special education, training or skill.

From the title, it will appear that this august audience wants me to discuss the process that is needed to keep librarians in Akwa Ibom State involved in their jobs or make their feel like learning more about the library and information science profession – their profession.

From this topic, I presume that the interest of the librarians in their profession is reducing or waning. If this presumption is true, the following approaches are necessary:

1. Discover the causes for the loss of interest, and
2. Proffer solutions to these causes/problems.

Before we proceed further, we will establish who a librarian is.

## **Who is a Librarian?**

Both theoretically and practically, a librarian is a professionally trained individual responsible for the care of a library and its contents including the selection, processing and organization of materials and the delivery of information, instructions, and loan services, to meet the needs of its users. According to the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Act of 1995, A Librarian symbolizes any person registered or deemed to be registered as such under the Act .Therefore, to legally practice as a librarian in Nigeria, a person is required to register with the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The LRCN Act, Section 9 further states that such a person must:

- a. Possess the requisite qualifications approved by the Council
- b. Not being a Nigerian, hold a qualification granted outside Nigeria which for the time being is accepted by the Council and is by law entitled to practice for all purposes as a librarian in the country in which the qualification was granted; provided that the other country accords Nigerian professional librarians the same reciprocal treatment and that he/she satisfies the Council that he/she has sufficient practical experience as a librarian.
- c. Be of good character; not to have been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty.

Librarianship today has arrived at the information age where the role of information is increasingly emphasized as an economic resource, a marketable commodity and as a social wealth. In this context, the roles of librarians are of great importance. He/she will have to act as a facilitator, advisor, consultant, instructor, navigator, searcher, researcher, evaluator, organiser, preserver, promoter, communicator, technical expert, as well as a manager, entrepreneur and visionary leader.

Library Information Science Education in Nigeria today cannot be relevant without effective preparation of new generation of librarians to effectively use the new information and communication technology (ICT) in their professional

practices. It is the establishment of libraries that gave birth to librarianship and so I wish to briefly trace the historical development of libraries.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA**

The governments of different countries establish libraries for the development of different sectors of the nation, for instance their educational, national, economic and public sectors. The growth of any organization is directly proportional to the knowledge base of its operations. The origin and development of libraries in Sub-Saharan African countries were influenced by the attitudes of its governing countries. The colonial government influenced the establishment of many libraries in African countries. In Nigeria, libraries were introduced by the colonial government and international organizations. Specifically, library development in the Eastern Nigeria started with the input from UNESCO Seminar on the Public library development in 1953. The Board had its Headquarters located at Enugu, with other branches at Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Umuahia, Abakaliki, Calabar and Ikot Ekpene. Thus Akwa Ibom State inherited library services from the Eastern Region government. This development gave birth to the establishment of five public libraries in the state at Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, Eket, Abak and Etinan. Academic libraries in Akwa Ibom State also started with the establishment of tertiary institutions in the state and today there are over ten academic libraries in the state which includes federal, state and private institutions. There are also special, family and private libraries established in the state for information access, retrieval and utilization. The development of libraries in the state further extended to the schools with the establishment of school libraries in most of the schools in the state. The development of libraries in Akwa Ibom State was further strengthened with the establishment of the Ibom e-library for the provision of electronic library services in the state. This enhances search, retrieval and utilization of electronic resources in the state in line with the information

age. The establishment of these libraries empowers the practice of librarianship in the state.

### **Development of Librarianship in Nigeria**

Librarianship as a profession began to take roots in Nigeria when the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) was established in 1948 and John Harris was appointed its first Librarian in that year. He did not only encourage and help many young Nigerians to qualify as librarians; he was also very instrumental in the establishment of the first library school in the country. The first Nigerian librarian, Kalu Okorie, qualified in 1950. A few years later others followed in his footsteps, until there emerged a continuous stream of young qualified librarians joining the profession every year. Initially all the pioneer librarians were trained abroad. However libraries were developing at a faster rate than they could depend on overseas institutions for the provision of all their trained manpower requirements. Based on Library needs of West Africa and Northern Nigeria respectively, two Library Schools were established in Nigeria. The first was the Institute of Librarianship which was opened at the University College Ibadan in 1960, and the second was at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in 1968. These institutions were built on different philosophical and professional orientations. The Ibadan Library School began with one year basic professional program leading to the award of the post-graduate diploma with the main objective of "educating the leadership for the library profession", while the Zaria Library School started with under-graduate program leading to the award of the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree based on the objective of training professional librarians at all levels with well rounded education up to international standard while placing emphasis on the problems facing libraries in Africa. And now there are over twenty five library schools in Nigeria including University of Uyo in Akwa Ibom State. The establishment of more library and information science schools in tertiary institutions and the large enrolment of students to study the course have shown that libraries and information units are no more regarded as closed systems.

With the acquisition of degrees in library and information science it became necessary to formally define who a librarian is. The signing of Decree 12 of 1995 establishing the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria, into law by late General Sani Abacha, then Head of State heralded the official recognition of the profession to be at par with other professions in Nigeria. Since those early days the number of qualified librarians in Nigeria has grown steadily to about 10,000 qualified library and information professionals.

### **Causes of loss of Interest in the Profession?**

It is of a truth that some librarians stumbled into the profession while pursuing other career goals.

Rathbun – grubb (2013) identified several reasons why librarians leave the profession to include: career structure, poor salaries, stress, Lack of flexible work arrangements, desire to use LIS skills in a different setting, women dominated the profession, limited opportunities for promotion and poor perception of the profession by the society. The study concluded thus: "If people want to leave the profession, it really doesn't matter a whole lot. The fact, unfortunate or not, is that there's a long line of people waiting to replace them."

### **Arresting Waning Interest in the profession**

There are several ways of ensuring that interest of Library and Information Science professionals are sustained. They include:

#### **Curriculum development**

Librarianship starts from the classroom where the library and information science students are taught the essentials of the profession. Therefore, the curriculum should reflect exactly what the practice is after the classroom. The library and information science programmes should be so designed as to equip the students:

- with knowledge and techniques to handle the immediate job requirements in an efficient manner; and

- To develop programmes, procedures and services on modern lines in future where the use of various modern technique, computers among others, could provide better, quicker and efficient service.
- The provision of opportunities to meet the basic learning needs of information professionals is a first step towards preparing library and information science schools in Nigeria for the emerging global society. The relevance and viability of library and information science education in Nigeria requires looking at both the access to and quality in new ways to enhancing the quality of products turned out from the universities into the labour market. The survival of library and information science education in Nigeria depends largely on the quality of training given to the students in the library school,. This is significant because half backed librarians will surely abandon the profession to something else.

### **Professional development**

Professional development activities in the library are activities designed for personal and professional growth of librarians. These activities are usually formal or informal in nature. It is a lifetime learning process, which is both universal and individualized. It is a universal requirement of all librarians in order to keep up with the rapid changes in the library field and maintain professionalism. At the same time, it is an individualized experience that varies with the needs of specific work duties as well as resources available around one's working, social and academic environment.

Professional development demonstrates the individual practitioner's personal commitment of time and effort to ensure excellence in performance throughout his or her career. The dynamic and changing library and information environment demands that library and information professionals maintain and continue to develop their knowledge and skills so that they can anticipate and serve the information needs of the society and their individual clients.

The changing role of a professional librarian as handler and manager of information need flexible, adaptable individuals who can manage changes effectively. These developments have necessitated the need for librarians to update their knowledge, acquire new skills and maintain basic competencies. Library profession is dynamic and challenging and the most productive and effective way for librarians to meet these challenges is to seek out professional development opportunities. The rapid changes in the information world and, library and information science education have increased the need for learning almost immediately after completing professional education. Similarly, the new trends in information sources, technology, users' needs and management of libraries and information services emphasize the requirement for continuing education and retraining. The demand for continuing education programmes arise from a number of areas such as development in the external environment, internal organization factors, or individual requirements. These factors may relate to areas such as technological development, economic situation, social values and educational change.

Given the fact that the cost of training is enormous and only few employers can afford to send staff on training on a regular basis, there should be the possibility of improving one's career from one's work place. This is why the importance of libraries in providing the enabling environment becomes important. Thus, realistically, professional development or the concept of capacity building would be enhanced if it is linked to work situation, that is, one does not have to leave the site of work before one could be professionally developed. As expected, libraries would always play a critical role in professional development or capacity building at all levels, whether leading to the award of certificate or gaining competences in a particular topic. Thus, libraries could promote the development of professionals or the concept of capacity building through distance education, surfing the Internet and professional literature

## **Continuous Education**

Librarianship, like any other profession that requires a lot of training is devoted to applying theory and technology to the creation, selection, organization, management, preservation, dissemination and utilization of collections of information in all formats. Rapid developments in information and communication technologies have raised the need for training of librarians.

These transformative trends in the society have substantially altered the boundaries of the profession. For example the increased use of the World Wide Web in private, academic and social lives of people in our society today exhibits the fact that those involved in information services need to be sufficiently prepared to handle both the users of information and the attendant technologies. With these technological changes, it is expected that librarians need to keep up to date with these changes by continuous updating and development of current and new skills. Librarians must be positioned as key educators in the teaching and learning environments of the society. Those Librarians who resist these change are the ones that always think of leaving the profession to other areas.

Training opportunities should not be limited to formal education only it should include in-service or on the job training, attendance at seminars and conferences , workshops and staff development awards. To this end management at different levels should encourage librarians by sponsoring them to these training opportunities. Heads of libraries should also organize from time to time in- house -training to update the skills on librarians for effective service delivery in the twenty first century libraries. Experienced librarians may rise to managerial positions requiring administrative skills such as financial planning and human resource management. Thus, the need for an in-depth training for librarians is in high demand in Akwa Ibom State in particular and across the nation in general.

## **Mentoring**

Experienced librarians have a responsibility to support and mentor their newer colleagues whether formal or informal. They should guide and assist new professionals and students in the profession to develop. We were all new once and can probably remember how hard it was to adjust to the work environment and the culture. The older librarians all have valuable things to share with the new or next generation of librarians, and we owe it to them to help them grow and flourish in the profession. Whether you formally mentor someone or just offer to interact with a new colleague, supporting new librarians is not only the right thing to do, it is also a rewarding action. With mentoring, we are not just supporting that person; we are strengthening libraries and training future leaders.

Mentoring enables the protégé to be prepared by transferring relevant knowledge and also provides an enriching and supportive environment for the new entrant to the profession and the professional association. Thoughtful and effective mentoring practices sponsored by library administrators can assist in meeting the transitional challenges as well as rejuvenating the professional library workforce. Mentoring is an essential part of the leadership journey because mentoring provides opportunities for significant personal, professional and leadership development. In a time of rapid change for the library and information science world due to the impact of technological innovation, mentoring will definitely play a sizable role as a guiding light.

Effective mentoring is essential for the growth and success of librarianship. Mentoring is recognized as one way of facilitating learning in the workplace, and is designed to make use of guided learning to develop the knowledge and skills required for high performance. Fostering mentoring activities throughout the stages of a librarian's career and guiding and supporting career paths will be important for librarians and library organizations.

## **Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship**

The fear of most librarians today is how they will survive after retirement. These calls for librarians to be equipped with requisite skills to enable them become innovators and creators of wealth. The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) in many instances have organized workshops on 'Entrepreneurship in Librarianship' These workshops are meant to re-position librarianship for meaningful contribution and participation in the current entrepreneurship drive in the country taking into account the unemployment rate in the country as well as the state of the economy. No profession is well placed to encourage self-sustenance for its members or develop entrepreneurs than the information profession. Libraries and librarians are reservoirs of knowledge that the public can harness to promote their entrepreneurial skills. The information society, has provided numerous opportunities for librarians to be self-sustaining through Information consultancy, packaging, branding, selective dissemination, database administration and management, website content management etc. These skills are of great benefit to librarians who intend to go into private practice on or before retirement. The goals of librarians as entrepreneurs are not only to earn higher income but to solve problems by facilitating access to information

## **COLLABORATION**

Collaboration is not a new concept in the library world. It is a process that brings together members of organizations, institutions agencies and resources together to produce outcomes directed to the enhancement of education. This process of bringing together members and resources has manifested in numerous ways in different library Collaboration provide a forum for global dialogue and idea-sharing that can lead to improvements in governments and cultural institutions. Isolation is not the key success in librarianship. Why some people want to leave the profession may be their inability to meet up with the level of publications that are demanded of them. These calls for why younger librarians should collaborate with older librarians for paper presentation at workshops, seminars and conferences. With the economic situations in our country today, librarians should see the need to collaborate and write papers for publications.

An adage says two heads are better than one so I believe that collaborative researches are more result oriented than single/individual researches. I therefore call on the younger librarians not run away from the profession rather they should draw closer to the older librarians and begin to collaborate based on their areas of interest and specialization.

### **The role of the Nigerian Library Association**

The Nigerian Library Association plays an important role in the development and sustenance of librarianship as a profession vital to an informed and knowledgeable society. It facilitates forums where knowledge can be created, shared and disseminated to enable members to better understand the dynamic environment in which they, as library and information professionals, and their clients operate. It is a forum to formerly recognize, identify and welcome all certified Librarians. It is sad to note that some libraries are led by those who do not have any library and information science certificate therefore for any professional to work under such people they will one day abandon the profession. Hence, NLA in conjunction with the Librarians Registration Council should ensure that this menace is erased from librarianship.

Members of NLA should advocate collectively and collaboratively, regardless of library type. Articulating the value of the library professional in ways that resonate with national decision makers and influencers will be most successful when we demonstrate how the library professional supports learning in the context of inclusive growth. This kind of collaboration can be helpful in policy discussions that deal less with library funding and more with issues that advance the broader public interest.

Just as information easily crosses borders, our challenge now is to take a larger role on the world stage. We need to lead our association in addressing critical issues that will shape the global information infrastructure. We need to urge members of the public and policy-makers to use and support libraries as multicultural institutions that connect even the smallest and most remote communities to global resources. We must unite

with colleagues around the world in addressing funding, information equity, copyright and other issues that will shape the global information infrastructure. Today's libraries offer access to worldwide information resources and local accessibility.

It was difficult even a decade ago to imagine having a world of information always available in your pocket, but now it is almost as difficult to imagine not being connected to people, places, and things round the clock. One implication of this rapid adoption of mobile technology is that it's entirely possible that some individuals will never set foot into a library for the first two decades of their lives. Given this context, we need to develop a plan for bringing members of the society back to the library to ginger librarians.

### **The library Environment.**

Permit me at this juncture to say that the environment an individual works encourages or discourages effective service delivery and continuity in the profession. The working environment is likely to dampen employee's moral, and as a consequence, contributes less to the total organizational output and sustenance of interest in the profession. Conducive work environment is crucial to the successful accomplishment of the roles and functions of librarians especially in public and school libraries in our nation Nigeria. Work environment could be seen as the physical, social, psychological and technological conditions that are found in the work places that impacts the job performance and interest of librarians. Environmental factors include social interaction, power supply, physical facilities, lighting level and motivation. The work place or environment can impede or enhance the productivity of librarians whose jobs require comfortable, conducive, and congenial environments. Some public library buildings are highly dilapidated. There are no infrastructures at all. There should be a balance between naturally ventilated libraries with fresh air and sunshine. The library's internal and external environment should also be aesthetically inviting. I therefore call on government at different levels to assist in the interest development and sustenance of

librarians in the state through the development of infrastructures in mostly the public libraries in the state.

## **Conclusion**

Librarians are professionals endowed with highest competence and integrity in information management. I encourage all of us to think of ways of moving the profession to the next level. We should also aspire to catch up with our Colleagues in the developed countries instead of losing interest in the profession.

Therefore the way forward include:

- Learning all you can from all the sources including the internet
- Save money and go to conference at least once in a year
- Ensure you subscribe at least to one professional journal
- Ensure you belong to a professional group
- Pray to God regularly and have faith in God that all will be well.

Let me conclude by saying: I am proud to be a Librarian and should you have need to find information source, ***“please ask the Librarian”***.

Thank you.

