PROFESSIONALISM AND LIBRARIANSHIP IN NIGERIA

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The emergence of libraries and librarianship and the activities of the profession of librarianship in Nigeria are discussed. The development and growth of the Nigerian Library Association and its achievements through three decades are studied and suggestions for its revitalization are offered.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of librarianship in Nigeria has come of age and as we approach the 21st Century there is a need to reflect on the three decades of librarianship to analyse developments, and examine how far ideals of John Harris, the father of Nigerian librarianship have been blossomed into reality.

PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR PROFESSION

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English [1] defines the term *Profession* as, “occupation, one requiring advanced education and special training, e.g. law, architecture, medicine, accountancy.”

Ezekwugo [2] gave the general characteristics of a profession as encompassing the following:

- Long period of specialised preparation, involvement in activities that are mainly intellectual; possessing specialised knowledge and skill; relatively high standards of admission policy; ability to regard the job as a life career; natural love and aptitude for the job; having a disciplinary council to regulate ethical standards to stipulate do’s and don’t’s and to protect the image and integrity of the profession.
- Professionals on the other hand according to Ezekwugo [3], are experts in their choice career. They make open declaration in terms and vow to protect the integrity of the profession. Their’s is a vocation of apprenticeship, expertise in learning, training and dedication..... should have a broad range of autonomy and goals to be attained. They should have a way of detecting quacks, be guided by work ethics and give high priority to service above self. They should have a way of safeguarding the welfare of members who should have a licence or certificate. The productivity must be regulated to measure favourably with their take home pay.

EMERGENCE OF THE LIBRARY PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

The library profession in Nigeria emerged during the Nigerian pre-colonial period. In 1900, the Justice Ministry library was established in Lagos out of the need for bibliographical control of growing colonial legal documents. Apart from that, the only library then was the European Community or Club library, whose membership was restricted to the Europeans except if one (non-European) can afford a registration fee of one Guinea per adult. At that time one Guinea was too prohibitive. The earning of Nigerians then for a library and the prohibitive cost of being a member of the European library in Lagos made them make consultations with the colonial government and the Lagos Town Council (L.T.C.) on the possibility of setting up a new library for Lagos. This effort was realized in 1948 when the British Council, jointly with the Lagos Town Council (L.T.C.), opened the Lagos Municipal Library (L.M.L.). After three years of joint management, the British Council handed over the Library to the Lagos Municipal Council (1952).
Apart from laying the foundation for the development of libraries to meet local aspirations, it also provided an opportunity for the beginning of the library profession. Efforts of international organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, British Council, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also contributed to the development of the library profession in Nigeria.

In 1953, the UNESCO organised a seminar on the development of public libraries in Africa. The seminar, the first of its kind in black Africa (held in Ibadan, Nigeria) was historic and known as Annu Mirabilis. The brain behind the seminar was John Harris. At the end of the seminar, recommendations were made among which were: the establishment of a professional organ for libraries in British West Africa, and appeal for fund from Ford Foundation for the training of librarians. The seminar stressed the need for education and training of professionals in librarianship because training in professional library schools outside Africa, in countries /institutions geographically and intellectually remote from the realities of African problems does not and cannot provide a fully satisfactory alternative to properly, organised professional librarian training on African ground.

By 1954, on the UNESCO recommendation for the establishment of a professional organ for libraries in British West Africa, the West African Library Association (W.A.L.A.) was formed, with its publication the W.A.L.A. News. In 1960, an Institute of Librarianship was established in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Formation of the Nigerian Library Association (N.L.A.)**

The Nigerian Library Association is said to have been formed circumstantially. The economic and practical difficulties involved in holding meetings in various Anglophone West African countries and the forces of nationalism, led to the beginning of the end of the young association. When the two most powerful member countries of the association (Ghana) and (Nigeria) got their independence from Britain in 1957 and 1960, their own national associations - the Ghana Library Association (G.L.A.) and the Nigerian Library Association (N.L.A.) were formed. The birth of these associations according to Ogunsheye [6], led to the discontinuation of the West African Library Association (W.A.L.A.) at Ibadan in December, 1961.

In the inaugural conference [7] held in December, 1962, the Nigerian Library Association adopted WALA's resolutions. The resolutions amongst others had provision of:

i) Library Advisory Consultative Committee for library services in Nigeria;

ii) Library legislation at federal and regional levels;

iii) Professional training school in Nigeria;

iv) Bibliographic services;

v) National reference and research services by a central body for the whole country;

vi) Book preservation and binding facilities; and

vii) Book selection list service and research investigation into reading needs of the Nigerian public library clientele.

The N.L.A. later, added more to its resolutions which include creation of:

i) a National Commission for Libraries; and

ii) a Register of librarians practising in Nigeria.

The N.L.A.'s achievements after three decades, in the words of J.O. Fasanya [8], the President in a nutshell are:

i) Establishment of the National Library of Nigeria (1962);

ii) National Library Decree (1964) and (1970);

iii) Continuation with the Nigerian Publication Ordinance (1950);

iv) Establishment of State Library Boards:

a) Anambra State Library Board Act Law No. 3, 1979;

b) Bendel State (Former Mid West, Library Board Act No. 4, 1971;

c) Borno State Library Board Act No. 5 of 1982;

d) Cross River State (South Eastern State, Library Act No. 16, 1973;

e) Imo State Library Board Act No. 12, 1977;

f) Kaduna State Publication Act No. 11, 1976;

f) Kwara State Publication Act No. 9, 1977;

h) Lagos State Library Law No. 24, 1980;

i) Oyo State Library Board, 1988;

j) Plateau State Act No. 4, 1971; and

k) Rivers State Library Board Act No. D3, 1971; and
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v) Founding of Library Schools:
   a) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1968);
   b) Bayero University, Kano (1977);
   c) University of Maiduguri (1978);
   d) University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1983);
   e) Imo (now Abia) State University Okigwe (now in Uturu) (1981); and
   *f) Ibadan Institute of Librarianship (now Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan), Ibadan (1960). (WALA contributed to its establishment).

In the area of publication activities, Nigerian Libraries, N.L.A.’s official organ and Occasional Publications and Newsletter came up.

ELEMENTS OF A PROFESSION AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO THE LIBRARY PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

For a profession to grow and succeed it should have some or all of the following elements:

i) It must have systematic theory that is, knowledge organised into a consistent system.
ii) It must have authority that is, control over its field.
iii) It must have community sanction that is, the capability of effecting control over its members, and must have a formulated standard for the accreditation of institution(s) that train and produce manpower in its field.
iv) It must have legally backed ethics and codes that is, standardized rules.
v) It must have culture that is, norms, values, symbols which are career concepts.
vi) It must have service orientation.

Given these basic ingredients, the library profession in Nigeria is critically analysed in the following sections.

Systematic Theory

The very first library school in Nigeria, the first of its kind in Africa was established in Ibadan in 1960. This was followed by six university library schools and four polytechnics where librarianship is systematically taught at various levels. There is no country in Africa that has so many training institutions for librarians as it is in Nigeria. Yet, when one compares librarianship with other professions, the number of training institutions are very small indeed. For example, medical, law and engineering professions are taught in usually three quarters of the universities in Nigeria.

Despite the rationalisation and harmonisation of courses in the Nigerian universities few years back, librarianship as an intellectual discipline does not have a uniform syllabus which must be adhered to strictly by all library schools. There is also a disparity in the certificates awarded by the institutions and entry point into the various institutions. For example, the polytechnics run a two year National Diploma Programmes in Library Science and another two year Higher National Diploma Programmes. Others run a one year Certificate Programme in librarianship.

At the university level, Zaria, Kano, Maiduguri, Nsukka and Uturu offer a four year degree programme that leads to the award of the Bachelor of Library Science (B.L.S.) degree. From the onset the University of Ibadan has been training the Diploma, Master and Ph.D. students in librarianship. While the medical doctor has to get a licence from the Medical Council of Nigeria; and the lawyer has to pass through the Nigerian Law School for his B.L. (Bachelor of Law) to practice the profession, librarianship graduate in Nigeria is yet to pass through such a licensing body before he is allowed to practice the profession. In spite of the above library science institutions in Nigeria have good or standard systematic theory of thought comparable to those of the advanced world.

Authority

For a profession to have its impact in a society, it must have an organized body which has control over its field and clients. Library Association in Britain and the American Library Association in the United States of America can be said to have the distinction of having control over their profession and professionals. Just as these two bodies in Britain and America exert control and authority on their members, the Nigerian Library Association is not able to exert its influence and control on its professionals. The impact which the Nigerian Bar Association and Nigerian Medical Association have with the authorities and the society cannot be said to be true in case of Nigerian Library Association. Libraries according to Fasanya [9], have a role in national development which no other agency can play. Quoting
Johnson and Harris, Afrifanyan [10], observes, books and libraries became the most powerful factor in man’s cultural, scientific, material, and even spiritual advancement. This premise or this assertion is to be found in ...those nations that had access to reading books and have made greater progress than their counterparts lacking such opportunity.

In contrary to the universal importance of libraries and librarianship the profession in Nigeria is rather weak. With 30 States in the federation, there is little effective organisation and coordination of its activities even though it organises the annual conference.

The reason may be attributed to the developing nature of the profession as compared to the others mentioned earlier and the inadequate support given by government and the society. The fact that library services are social services offered with almost no charge, its immense effect is not felt much as the medical doctors or lawyers.

Community Sanction

There was never a time when the Nigerian Library Association effected control over its members, for example, in the area of non-professional behaviour or misconduct. Also, the N.L.A. has never shown its capability of accrediting a library school in Nigeria. That is why some polytechnics in Nigeria have started running the Diploma (ND & HND) programmes in Nigeria, producing graduates in the field. With the authority to N.L.A. as in the case of the Nigerian Bar Association and the Nigerian Medical Association, it will not be possible for every institution to initiate such courses. Stipulated standards must be met such as physical infrastructures, adequate resources and qualified academic and non-academic manpower to say the least. The N.L.A. has no list of registered librarians in Nigeria and there is no way to check any non-professional conduct.

There is an appreciable effort being done towards this issue as, J.O. Fasanya, the N.L.A. President [11] comments: The National Commission for Libraries and also the Council for the Registration of Librarians in Nigeria are currently in the hand of a major Ad-Hoc Committee of the N.L.A. and have been forwarded to the honourable Minister of Education for further action.

A draft decree on the Council for the Registration of Librarians in Nigeria was submitted to the Minister of Education in 1991 and if it is finally released, the Council will be charged with the general duty of:

i) determining what standards of knowledge and skills are to be attained by persons seeking to become members of the library profession and reviewing those standards from time to time as circumstances may permit;

ii) securing the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice the profession and the publication from time to time of lists of those persons;

iii) regulating and controlling the practice of librarianship in all its aspects and ramifications; and

iv) performing other functions conferred on the Council by the Act that establishes it [12].

With this draft, it is hoped that when finally decreed the N.L.A. will have cause to smile.

Ethics and Codes

The fact that N.L.A. has no legally backed ethics and codes, it cannot regulate the practice of librarianship in the country. Until the decree backing the establishment of the Council or the Registration of Librarians is enacted it is difficult for the association to do anything about the practice.

Culture

Of all the ingredients analysed, this, perhaps, is the one which can be said with some degree of certainty where the Nigerian Library Association is playing a satisfactory role. Every professional body is expected to have norms, values and of course symbols. These entail creating time among members periodically to rub minds intellectually, socially and culturally in the forms of organising meeting, conferences, seminars, workshops and symposia to say the least. The N.L.A. creditably has done well in this direction especially with its annual conference. Though not well coordinated or legally affiliated to the umbrella body, there are sub-associations like the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators.
(N.A.L.I.S.E.) where academics in the library institutions in Nigeria hold conference every two years. There is also the Association of School Librarians.

Service Orientation

Finally, though the professionals do as much to save their interests legally, financially, educationally and otherwise, they still have concern in their special ways of service to the public. It is not every body that can afford the sometimes prohibitive cost of hiring a professional like the medical doctor and lawyer. Knowing these the professional bodies render some services to the public or society, especially to those incapable of paying the bill for their services.

Coming to the librarianship profession in Nigeria, the N.L.A. has been promoting the readership promotion campaigns at the national, state and local government level using the print and electronic media free of charge. Apart from the special libraries who even charge a small fee as service and resource use charge, the national, state and local government libraries, primary, post-primary and the tertiary institution’s libraries have been providing free library services. In short, library service in Nigeria is 99% free despite the fact that the libraries do not generate resources that can in any way sustain their operations. They all depend on Federal or State or their parent organisations subvention.

SUGGESTIVE STEPS TO REVITALISE THE PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

1) The N.L.A. should reactivate its state branches and open new branches in the newly created states in Nigeria.

2) There should be in each of these state branches state secretariats to oversee the activities of libraries and librarians in practice in their domain.

3) There should be a national secretariat in the country’s federal capital territory Abuja, with officials to run and oversee the activity of the 30 state branches of the Federation. All national issues should emanate from the national secretariat to the states and eventually to the members in the form of newsletters and other means deemed necessary.

4) The N.L.A. must not relent on its effort in getting a formal legal backing of the proposed National Commission for Libraries and the Council for the Registration of Libraries in Nigeria, in order to concretise the lofty ideals of their drafts to a better profession.

5) N.L.A. must look inwards and commercialise some of its services in order to compliment its lean resources from the governments or parent bodies. That is, the various libraries should charge fees on some services to generate revenue to function efficiently.

6) Finally, it is necessary to reiterate the observations of Fasanya [13]:

Libraries have come a long way from their humble beginnings, to now. Their business has multiplied manifold, becoming increasingly extensive and intensive. The need therefore arises to bring to use high level technology facilities in order to handle the complex operations and records, effectively and efficiently. The use of high technology calls for training, the type that conventional library schools are not equipped to offer. It is imperative therefore for library education in Nigeria to modify its curriculum for meeting the needs of future library practice.

For the libraries and librarians in practice he expressed the reality that by shying away from introducing high technology (use of computers) in performing their operations in view of their high prices, they are merely postponing the evil day. Libraries and librarians are indispensable in the national development of a nation, and Nigeria is not an exception.

REFERENCES


3. Ibid.


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid. p. 4-6.


12. Duties of the Council for Registration of Librarians in Nigeria, as contained in Draft Decree submitted August, 1991 to the Honourable Minister of Education.