

RE-INVENTING NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

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Abstract

This paper considered re-inventing Nigerian University libraries: challenges and prospects for attitudinal change. The objective of the paper was to encourage excellence in Library services through attitudinal change among the rank and file of library staff. It was also to draw attention to critical ethical issues, which border on attitude of library staff. Some of these ethical issues that border on attitudinal change include: lateness to work; desertion of duty; library closure before the official time; noise-making, rudeness to library patrons and negotiation of over-due fines and defrauding the library. It proposed mentoring, career progression through research; right sizing / downsizing and retrenchment as measures that can bring attitudinal change.

Keywords: Attitude, Library, Staff, Nigeria, University Library,

Introduction

Universities exist to produce new knowledge and to question what already exists with the aim of promoting social change. Access to intellectual materials is therefore essential and this places libraries at the centre of this mission. It is very vital that the goals of university libraries be properly understood. The university library is the academic heartbeat of the University. Its basic purpose is to enhance scholarship, research and community service through the provision of intellectual materials, counseling assistance and creating a conducive learning environment to both students, academic and non-academic staff. As succinctly summarized by Bello and Musa (2003), the main goals of the library are to:

- (a) Provide materials in support of the teaching-learning process;
- (b) Provide educational materials to meet the requirements of faculty, postgraduate/undergraduate students and researchers;
- (c) Provide materials to support library users in their personal development;
- (d) Meet the specialized information needs of the community in which the University is situated.

Communication of and access to knowledge is of huge significance in Universities. Consequently, to aid academics to compete internationally, and to ensure that their research contributes to global knowledge, they need reliable access to current literature. Therefore, without professional librarianship, skilled for the above challenges, scholars are likely to find the future difficult to navigate (Harle, 2007).

As the shape and role of libraries change as a result of the pervading impact of technology, there are considerable challenges for the profession, especially, in Nigeria with low literacy rate. Several studies on school libraries at the primary and secondary school levels in Nigeria revealed that there are almost no libraries and that the provision of useful supplementary literary materials in the classroom at those levels is virtually non-existent (Read, 1990). Where libraries exist in primary schools, they are limited to elite and private schools, which are often models that could not be replicated on a national scale (Ogunrombi, 1993). This implies that most students transiting from Nigerian secondary schools to the Universities have little or no contact with libraries. This poses a great challenge to Librarians in tertiary institutions in the bid to cultivate reading habits in those students. The major bugbear for both students and library staff is poverty, with the attendant "cutting of corners," a fall-out from the indiscipline malaise that

has engulfed the Nigerian society. This has impacted negatively on the attitude of library staff, a microcosm of the larger Nigerian decadent society.

Ranganathan cited by Satija (1993) pointed out the conceptual framework for library service, which hinges on five laws of librarianship, namely:

- (i) Books are for use
- (ii) Every book has its reader
- (iii) Every reader has its books
- (iv) Save the time of the user
- (v) A Library is a growing organism

Service is the major philosophy on which librarianship is premised and the attendant accessibility of relevant materials. Therefore, Ranganathan's laws are germane to building excellent library services for scholarship and research. The library should tilt focus from research quantity to research quality and be made an attractive "one stop-shop" by fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for individuals to pursue scholarship and research with ease, and to grow and excel as intellectual giants. To achieve this objective, it behooves the library administration to grow "forests of talents" among its staff through openness to ideas (mentoring), training opportunities and change. This will create an environment where the strength of staff synergize and multiply manifold, transforming ordinary talents into extra-ordinary talents, and extra-ordinary talents into stars.

As a constituent of the Nigerian polity, universities and their units, departments and divisions need to purge themselves of indiscipline in all its ramifications. In reality a small proportion of the workforce in Libraries are unethical, yet their misdeeds create negative publicity and moral problems. Ogunrombi (2003) documented the decaying moral tone of library staff, which encompasses:

- (a) Lateness to work;
- (b) Desertion of duty posts;
- (c) Library closure before official time/forcing users to leave the library before normal closing hours;
- (d) Noise-making;
- (e) Rudeness to users;
- (f) Negotiating over-due fines and defrauding the Library.

Punctuality and regularity at work is another ethical issue plaguing Nigerian university library that has been well documented in library Science literature in Nigeria. However, the hallmark of the library profession is prompt service, punctuality and regularity at work. These are imperatives as the sole of business. Opening the library at the advertised time/opening hours would go a long way in fostering good relationship between the library and her patrons. Library staff should therefore, cultivate the culture of punctuality in an environment where reading culture is abysmally low. In upholding the culture of best practices, opening hours should be strictly adhered to while, library staff should not aid theft of library materials.

Challenges

Universities library operation and services are riddled with challenges. These challenges are multifaceted and cut across several area of human endeavour. Some of these challenges, which must be overcome to re-invent the library, are discussed below.

(a) Frustration

Idiodi and Igbinosa (2003) defined frustration in the use of libraries as "the action of disappointment where a reader is unable to get the material he/she wants in a Library." Other frustrating factors include the poor attitude of some Library staff, circulation/shelving error and cataloguing error. The effectiveness of a university library determines largely the extent of teaching, learning and research activities in the University. Since frustration is an index of failure, librarians should strive hard to eliminate failure rates in the library system. Librarianship being an

interactive process between librarians and patrons, librarians should apply aggressive marketing strategies to library services. This is the only way services offered could be meaningful, friendly and rewarding to the patrons. A frustrated library patron is unlikely to visit/use the Library regularly. Therefore, librarians walk-up to patrons, chat them up to ascertain their information needs and teach them search techniques to conserve time and energy. Moreover, proper shelving and shelf reading are professional practices that should be taken serious to reduce user frustration. Finally, Library management should insist on professionalism in Library practices to eliminate failures in the use of the Library.

(b) Mentoring

Roberts (1986) advocated the use of mentoring programmes in academic libraries as a means of staff development for both junior professional and newly employed librarians. Library leadership should mentor her staff as they grow in the profession. This will aid the growth of "forest of talents" among the staff.

Ogunrombi (2003) affirmed that mentoring fosters confidence of the mentee in both the library organization and Library management. This will in turn entrench positive working relationships, contribute to both the mentee's professional cum personal growth and the organization's increased effectiveness. Therefore, to increased the pool of experienced academic librarians, mentoring be adopted, more so, because it can be a faster means of learning than direct experience. It provides the opportunity to learn by association because good leadership is essential for the effective functioning of a university library, the university librarian should encourage and develop truly inspiring leaders by: setting goals for qualitative library service, draw-up a schedule of duty for the staff and mentor staff on research and publication.

(C) Career Planning

Deciding on a particular profession is only half the task. However, focus planning helps you with (why and how) focusing and organizing yourself. Get your priorities right by developing a systematic plan. Fortunately, career planning is never too late. Librarians as information provided need to look into the future as "I - don't care" or "anything goes" approach won't allow you to reach your full potential. Training certification and work experience are best considered within the context of your unique, individual career development plan. Career planning is a rewarding and positive experience (Mathew, 2007). The following are its imperatives

- (i) Career planning as an annual event.
- (ii) Mapping: This entails assessing and reassessing plans to ascertain whether or not the career path is fulfilling.
- (iii) Note past accomplishments: Keep a good record of past accomplishment to reveal gotten successes that could trigger researching and planning a career shift. Tracking and leveraging accomplishment is a good guide.
- (iv) Acquisition of transferable skills: These are skills germane to optimal performance in any career.
- (v) Review career and job trend: re-position and market your excellent skills.
- (vi) Set career and job goals: Develop a roadmap for your job and career success.
- (vii) Explore new education/training opportunities: Education leads to power and success. Take time to contemplate the types of educational experiences that with help you achieve your career goals. Look within your University, Library, professional association, as well as online distance learning programmes to find potential career - enhancing opportunities and then find a way to achieve them.
- (viii) Research further career/job advancement opportunities: Dream dreams of where you will be in the future. Successful career planning is all about attitude. A positive attitude towards career can eliminate career stagnation and the attendant frustration.

(D) Career Progression through Research and Publication

"Wanted: research-oriented professionals in Nigeria's academic libraries to meet the changing demands and new challenges in academia," was the poser raised by Adelabu (1984). In a similar vein, Osundina (1972) asked questions such as "What are the Librarian's obligations? Does he not contribute more if he does research, publishes the results of such investigations, sits at seminars or even accept teaching load?"

Ogunrombi (1991) also affirmed that the issue of academic status for professional librarians has generated and will continue to generate a lot of discussion. He further stated that academic status requires the active involvement of Librarians in research and publication so that they (Librarians) can compare favourably well with their academic teaching counterparts and enjoy corresponding rights to rank, promotion and research grants. Therefore, as teaching and learning have continued to move in the direction of planned enquiry and discovering learning, Librarians must be able to do research, assess the product of such research and make the results available for further investigation and use. There should be a steady consciousness among academic Librarians of the imperative need for academic library research as the only acceptable means of a sustainable Library Science profession. To strengthen and deepen the research capacity of Librarians, the need to take advantage of the staff development programmes in their University to pursue graduate courses up to doctorate level.

(E) Application of Technology to Library Services

The digital age, the information society, the knowledge economy - are terms that are now common in discussions of education, technology and ICT. Such phrases sound far removed from the traditional concept of libraries, with their miles of shelving, dense stacks and thousands of books and journals. But technology, and a library's embrace with it, is not just about what is seen viz: the physical display of modern ICT facilities; it is also about what is not seen: the way it allows information to be arranged and linked in new ways and with increasing sophistication. Moreover, hard copy of books and journals are still relevant to this information age and for all the talk of the internet and digital collections, the importance or the technologically humble printed page should not be overlooked. The pervading influence of technology makes it imperative for Library staff to acquire skills in information technology that could be employed to readily store and retrieve information and ensure unhindered access to information. Librarians that are connected to colleagues around the world, just as their collections are connected via the internet, will be much better placed to move academic institutions forward, and ensure that scholarship has the resources and knowledge it needs.

Information management is already a challenge and will become more so as users develop new needs and become more demanding in their expectations. Dedicated systems Librarians will be needed to assist academics, who might otherwise spend hours sifting through pages of on-screen data. The challenge that ICT poses should not scare Librarians, instead, they should cultivate it to provide current information to meet the broad but varying needs of library patrons. ICT will not lead to loss of jobs; rather, it will enhance the marketability of professional Librarians. Whatever phobia Librarians have about the prospect of ICT should by now disappear because technology has come to stay, shrinking the global divide between the developed countries of the world that are technology-driven and developing countries like Nigeria.

Prospects

As organizations - private and public - continue to strive for survival, many strategies are being employed to ensure that anything that could be inimical to the organization is promptly dealt with without recourse to emotional interference from parties involved. Consequently, survival strategies such as rightsizing, downsizing, restructuring and retrenchment have become popularized as panacea for resolving corporate problems. Educational institutions are no exception to job rationalization in Nigeria today. Down-sizing and right-sizing are prospects in re-inventing the library profession in Nigeria. Many people who have been affected by the deployment of these strategies ponder aloud as to why they were victims. In some cases, those

laid-off manage to do self assessment that their productivity, lack of competence, laziness, truancy and lack of relevance were some of the criteria employed in identifying those that were retrenched.

Other factors that could be considered for staff retrenchment are: energy drive level, competence, brain power, creativity and user satisfaction. In the library all the aspect of services offered are measurable. Therefore, performance measurement criteria such as user satisfaction, shelving cum self-reading, cataloguing and classification, punctuality and regularity at work, compilation of user statistics, over-due notices, policy compliance, courtesy, etc could be employed.

In addition, continuous professional development, retraining, skill update could help one to retain his job. It therefore behooves all Library staff to devote their energy, commitment and efforts towards their professional mandates.

Conclusion

In the discourse, the mission of university libraries was articulated as well as the philosophy of librarianship, which is premised on service. To attain excellence in Library service, the need for attitudinal changes among the regular members of library staff was harped upon. This encompasses ethical issues, application of marketing strategies to library service provision, mentoring for professional growth and development, career progression through research and publication, application of technology to library services and how to escape being fired from the job. The need for positive change of attitude by Library staff ran through every aspect of the discourse. It is my hope that this clarion call to professional ethics will go a long way in guiding the Librarians to professional excellence in their professional career.

Recommendation

University library administrators are enjoined to formulate standards for measuring the moral tone of library staff for effective service delivery.

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