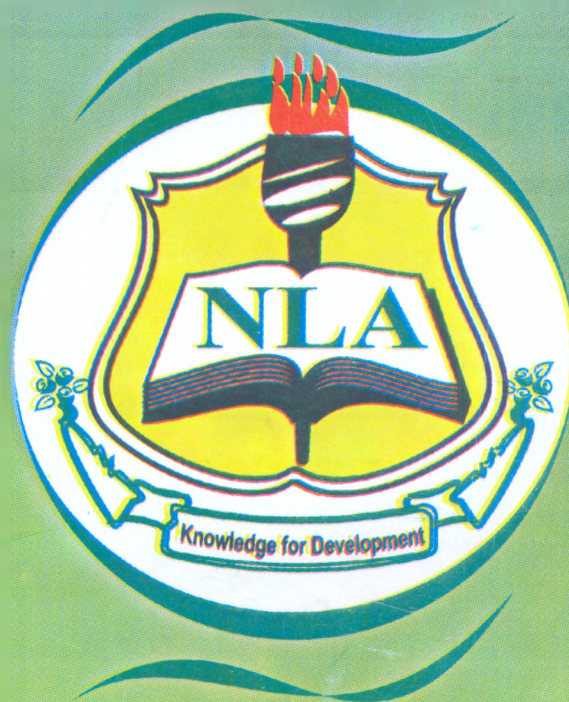


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LIBRARIANSHIP: BENEFITS, EXPECTATIONS AND CHALLENGES IN A COMPETITIVE INFORMATION WORLD

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Abstract

The paper reviews librarianship and presents the roles of librarians as requisite organs for information and knowledge dissemination. Enumerated are the benefits of librarians in taking charge of libraries, the acquisition, and processing, storing and retrieving information needed for decision making. It also pointed out that the assumed capacity of a librarian requires him/her to provide desired information thereby resolving challenges and serving to expectations. The paper pointed out that these demands and challenges are surmountable through exposures, desirable dispositions and embracing the changing technologies capable of complimenting the librarian's responsibilities in both the technological and social world which relies on his expertise to organize information. The paper recommended that librarians must take advantages of numerous capacity building trainings to equip and enable them perform optimally and also overcome the dwindling patronage to the libraries, and charged to have good public relation.

Keywords: Librarianship, competitive information, professionals, para-professionals, knowledge, society

Introduction

Librarianship prepares career librarians with the evaluation, processing, storing and retrieving information within instituted codes of ethics. The current dynamics of the profession has transforms the librarian from guiding patrons use collections, software, and online public access catalogs (OPACs) to assume numerous new and potentially alien responsibilities that include policy making and arbitrators of suffrages on the information arenas. It is worthy to note that librarianship is a well developed profession with established networks and associations where share knowledge and published

professional journals enable members perform optimally as information specialists. These imply that librarianship is bestowed with enormous responsibilities to restore man to desirable knowledge for his advancement.

Standard library has professional, para-professional and administrative (supporting) staff. Responsibilities of these members of a library differ according to the service available in a library and type. Professional librarians are graduates with wide range of technical and technological skills and talents on how information is generated, processed, stored, retrieved, transmitted and

disseminated. They have good communication and interpersonal abilities, also assumes the responsibility for providing reference assistance, develop and manage collections and overseeing cataloguing. Para-professionals however, assume most of the responsibilities for directly serving library users. Their activities include essential functions such as inputting, coding, and verifying bibliographic and other data; ordering library materials; assisting with catalog development; performing circulation duties such as checking out books to users; and performing other services vital to the library's daily operations. The administrative staff members are supportive with clerical duties and other essential tasks (Halsey *et al.*, 2009).

Benefiting Contributions of Librarians to the Knowledge Society and as Professionals

The reliability of man on information for every transaction and action has made the librarian the most auspicious professional in human history. Eisenberg (1990) and Lombardi (2000) revealed that access to information is the paramount issues on users mind when and where ever are in a library physically and/or virtually.

The benefiting contributions of librarianship according to Omekwu (2010) could be adjudged from the other revolutions (agricultural and industrial), for instance, during the industrial and agricultural revolutions the emphasis was on man and the key players were agricultural produce, machine and materials and money playing the central role. Incidentally, they now solely rely on information, without which other factors for production would fail. Information identifies who, when and where a venture can achieve its aims and objectives. These knowledge requirements made librarians, the information professionals, the main actors in the information and knowledge revolution. Its

expansion through history shows it as the long and forever lasting revolution known to man, starting with printing which provided man with recorded and written information in great mass (Jimba, 1999). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries however, the scenario rapidly transformed into an era of information explosion which necessitated a control and consolidation of the exponential growth and desire for information (Omekwu, 2010). Librarians have been able to provide the convergence for man to exploit for his activities and growth through the provision of effective information service and delivery.

According to Gates and Hemingway (1999), what differentiate competitors is what they are capable of using the information available to them to do in a prevailing competitive environment. It is therefore right to argue that librarians are critically relevant and their roles as information specialists beneficial to man as they support the rapid growth and transitory activities embarked upon by man for his upkeep by facilitating and supplying the information required for decision taking (Eskelson *et al.*, 2010).

General Expectation of a Librarian in a Competitive Information World

The tremendous development and transactions proliferated by enormous and high flow of information requirement has influence librarianship, information practice and the knowledge profession generally. Evidently is the departure from physical presence, walled barriers as factors to the availability and access to information. What preoccupy man is getting the right information at the right time, therefore, to satisfy this urge is not an easy task. These constitute the expectations from librarians as Information Professionals.

Ball (2003) opined that effective dissemination of information is very crucial in the development of any organization. He

said that until information is disseminated to an appropriate target and ensures knowledge of what is expected is achieved, there is no way the party whose responsibility is to provide that service could be said to be effective, prompt and competent. The overwhelming responsibilities of a librarian could be likened to the words of Waldman (2003) who expresses the tasks of a librarian to sought and comprehend factors relevant in encouraging persons seeking information, the factors predisposing patrons to use the library and its resources as opposed to surfing the internet.

Librarians must therefore explore their trainings and utilise their endowments to reach out and satisfy the information needs of man. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) failure of librarians in harnessing, processing and providing effective service delivery system resorted patrons' resolve to access other services, especially the World Wide Web, a great competitor of the library. Librarians are required to ease and be fully committed to the entire business of information harnessing and service delivery. Only then, could what Annerose (2009) asserted to include improved bargaining power, financial assistance, advocacy avenues and high patronage be achieved.

There is no denying the fact that librarianship is quite intellectually challenging and influenced greatly by external factors comprising dilemmas and ethical concerns. It is only effective librarianship that can shape the structure of all literary endeavours and scholarships. It is therefore not surprisingly that Kibirge and DePalo (2000) said librarians will ever remain indebted to, but relevance is their decisions to make for survival. Therefore, saying much is expected from a librarian could be an understatement considering the difficult terrains the librarians function; common are the dwindling financial allocations for collection development, inconsistency or lack of electricity,

connectivity, poor or absent staff capacity building opportunities in developing countries like Nigeria. These are not expected to deter the librarian from self-actualization. That is also why projects on reviving reading culture, books, plagiarism control and scholarship cheating, to mention but few depended to greater extent on the shoulder of the librarian for effective implementation (Kasa, 2011).

Challenges to Effective Librarianship

Different writers gave their perspectives on the challenges of librarianship (Garoogian, 1991; Mahajan and Chakravarty, 2007; Dicken, 2004 and Omekwu, 2010), most concerns are on the job expectations, low financial allocations and changing technologies. The issues raised affect the internal library system, for instance, Dicken (2004) posited that technology is the great growing engine of change and one of the most important processes underlying globalization and making the world an information village. How libraries can functionally integrate the dispersed activities across geographical boundaries and making their availability access and retrieval effortless through the different technologies in use remain significant challenges especially to the developing economies (Ohmae, 1995). Challenges that include poor projection and target setting, poor visibility of the library resources and lack of cordial librarian's and patron's relationships, impatience, poor attentiveness and listening to patrons' plight to resolve the problem(s) also precluded the nobility of librarianship.

Librarianship is social responsibility and consciousness to literary vulnerability and challenges. This constitutes why they cannot be rid of dilemmas. The inconsistencies and environmental influence on ethical application and the increasing level of discretions permissible to a librarian must not be jeopardized. These discretions

according to Trevino (1986) is that librarians can either follow self-chosen ethical principles or upholding values and rights regardless of opinions of the majority to attain a common good.

How to entrench ethical concerns and overcoming dilemmas requires that librarians must act in order to integrate the physical, moral and intellectual processes necessary for the recognition and support of information creators as well as users benefits. The complexities of any library rely on the values held by an individual, group or societies as a system. All that is required of librarians is to ensure that patrons and the information resources are accorded the desired concern (Du Mont, 1991; Mahajan and Chakravarty, 2007).

Furthermore, the roles of librarians in educational, technological institutions and the public domains reaffirms them to catalyze the information consumption chain and that knowledge may not be lost but sustained and maintained for posterity and retrospection. This coordinating virtue of librarians to make resources available and accessible to the needs and overcoming emergent challenges is herculean as well.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The place of a librarian cannot be overtaken by anybody, but librarians can self impede their effectiveness in the literary and knowledge environment. Though there are challenges, the librarian must be resolute to overcome and survive in the ever changing technological and social world. The dependent of man wholly on availability and access to information for his survival implies that man will forever desire a librarian, especially one who willingly makes himself available and relevant in the changing technological and social environment.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are proffered and not exhaustive roles of librarians and librarianship in a competitive information world:

1. Librarians must ensure that they specialize and avail themselves to numerous capacity building trainings that can enable them communicate and disseminate information using modern gadgets especially Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).
2. Public Relation courses should be introduced and made core courses at undergraduate and graduate programmes, where psychologies and how to contain patrons, coping with pressure and other problems are taught to addressing and overcoming their challenges.
3. Establishing a good library – patron relationship should be encouraged and utilized as an avenue to entrench ethical concerns of librarians hinging on fair use, copyrights and suffrages.
4. The action of a librarian must be directed to the general good as they are the last resort to elevate patrons of their information needs.

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