# Reforming Library and Information Science Education for a Viable and Functional 21st Century Profession

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***Abstract:*** *The library and information science practitioners in general, recognize the need to reform library and information science education to meet with the present trends. Library schools have failed to develop the required knowledge and skills relating to the use of information technology among students and the practitioners. As a result, the graduates from the library schools have little competitive potentials in the information market. This paper discusses the need for quality assurance in LIS schools, ICT as a tool for reformation, prospects and challenges of ICT in LIS education. However, ICT have the prospect of preparing the profession for a better direction. This turning point if grasped effectively, could graduate the LIS education and profession to catch up with other disciplines and failure will lead to falling behind.*

***Key words:*** *Education, Functional, Information, Reforming, Science, Profession, Viable*

## 1. Introduction

Today, within Nigeria, Librarians and library profession in general are continuously faced with problems of poor delivery strategies, poor practices and the problem of skills gap that is, our LIS graduates are not performing to expected capacity. The ultimate hope is that LIS graduate in Nigeria should be equipped, with relevant knowledge and skills for survival in the nearest future. That is the inculcation of the right professional values and altitude for the survival of individual and the acquisition of skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society. All of these, would result through, the instrumentality of conscious   and purposeful library and information science educational reform.

The term reform is etymologically derived from the Latin root reformare, which means "to shape".  It is a verb that refers to improvement by alteration, a correction of error or removal of defects (Yahoo Education, 2007). Reformation is   the process of improving a situation or to make a system work more effectively. A reform is a long process or programme that begins with problems identification study and analysis and ends with the evaluation and continuation or termination of the evaluation and continuation or termination of the programme (Miriogn, 2008). It involves among other things, the development of policy alternatives, experimentation, implementation and feedback.

The progressive and successful professions will always ensure that their educational system responds to, or moves in tandem, with its ever changing needs.

The necessity for strengthening LIS education in Nigeria has been widely acknowledged in the numerous conferences and workshops in the last decade. And the most powerful argument for reforming the LIS education have been the challenges posed by information technologies

## 1.1. Need for quality Assurance in LIS Education

Quality assurance in LIS education can be viewed as managing the way LIS education and services are provided in a bid to ensuring high standard. According to Akudo (2006), quality assurance deals with the practice or preventive means of ensuring quality inputs, teaching - learning process, the services and the academic achievement of students. In recent years higher qualifications have been demanded of professionals in the workplace, and the importance of professional education is increasing worldwide. In Nigeria training modes are basically provided at different programmes ranging from certificate courses, diploma, to degree, M.sc. and Ph.D. the provision of this training has prepared the LIS profession to reach the height of full – fledged discipline in the present era with few universities offering Ph.D. in the profession.

In the present day, LIS education not only includes the library specific subjects, but also has been extended to subjects like computer application, statistics, information science, management studies and operation research (Kamba, 2011). Hence modern library education has become a profession with a diversity of opportunities and challenges for LIS students and professionals (Jain, Kaur, and Babbar, 2007). It is common knowledge that over the past decade, evidences have shown that libraries, information centers and organizations are suffering from lack of adequate and competent manpower to manage their resources effectively.

## 2. ICT, a Tool for Reform

The escalating demand for librarians and information scientist at all levels in Nigeria and the compelling needs to provide LIS education for all would be professional, irrespective of environmental, social or cultural circumstances have meant that LIS educators and institutions must of necessity, find the appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge unmet demand for LIS education in this 21st century . This knowledge society is dominated by ICT, yet LIS education has not been able to use ICT to foster effective learning fully. However, it should be noted that ICT is a tool that can be used as a mean and enabler, but not as end by itself (Ololube, Eke, Uzorka, Ekpenyoung, and Nte, 2009). ICT tools are not magical, but using the right application software can have a remarkable positive influence on student attitudes towards learning as well as their abilities to comprehend and affect the world around them.

The application of modern information and communication technology (ICT) in the construction of educational paradigms has irrevocably changed the way in which, the teaching, learning and evaluation of library and information science are done in this country (Ozioko and Nwabueze, 2010). To face this new environment, LIS educators need to provide new skills and talents to LIS students and information professional in general in order for them to function properly in this present dispensation. This require LIS schools to produce LIS practitioners and professionals with requisite knowledge and skills for the changing landscape of library and information service operations via technologies, which will make them to becomes knowledge managers and navigators (Kamba, 2011). Hence, Udo (2000) opined that for the Nigerian library schools to face the challenges of the 21st century, the information studies programme in the

various Nigerian library schools should undertake reform/ innovation, which should emphasize information and communication technology both in theory and practice.

## 3. Prospects of ICT in LIS Education

ICTs have drastically changed the way information services are provided, so much that with the internet, a library can access and organize information and information resources as much as necessary, while library and information providers have been able to serve patrons, not only face to face, but also virtually (Ozioko and Nwabueze, 2010). The advent of e- learning 2.0 as a result of web 2.0 technology in teaching and learning is an opportunity for LIS schools to seize; this could also serve as a "messiah" for overcoming the challenges facing the LIS education (Kamba, 2011).

The use of e- learning 2.0 is basically on the use of social networking and web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and virtual world such as second as second life. Craig (2007) points out that e- learning 2.0 has the ability to influence new generation of LIS learners by the use of social networking sites, this new learning environment also has the capacity to provide them with new experiences and empower them to create, publish, and redistribute contents, information and knowledge. The new breed information workers in Nigeria need to be well informed about the tools for practicing his or her profession. Thus, e- learning 2.0 could have prospects for LIS education in the following ways.

- Preparing LIS graduates for leadership and management roles to support national and economic development in LIS profession.
- It makes collaboration and resources sharing among LIS school faster, easily effective and efficient
- It provides LIS students, with high level of dynamism i.e. learners progress at the pace and time that suits them best, while getting the appropriate information that they need.
- It supports LIS students to have access to information in real time that is current and up to date, through the web 2.0 tools or application, information databases, university websites, comparing intranets.
- It provide LIS students, with the opportunity to be able to meet in a virtual space, with other members and practitioners, experts to discuss issues, answer questions and even participate in simulations and management games, without having to leave their offices, hostels classrooms or homes.
- LIS students can benefits from learning, whenever they require, they are also able to access the right kind of training at the right time with the fright people.
- LIS students can have access to information, knowledge and learning when they want it. They can also have access to the learning materials.
- LIS students regardless of when they are can receive message, training and an able to engage other learners and practitioners globally at the same time (Kamba, 2011).
  In a nutshell, the global ICT revolution offers library schools and librarians in Nigeria the unique opportunity of actively participating in a globalized service delivery. This new form of learning environment will require a whole new set of skills from the LIS education. In line with this, Okojie (2013) opined that our plan is to ensure that by the end of 2013 we partner with the NUC to review the LIS curriculum in Nigeria with a

view to bringing it in tandem with global best practices and equip the graduates with the requisite skills to function in the 21$^{st}$ century.

Therefore, building ICT infrastructure in library schools in Nigeria should be seen as a 21$^{st}$ century necessity rather than optional directive to foster educational growth. In a nutshell, Ejedafiru (2010) observed that Nigeria direly needs to re-think and launch ICT-based revolutionary education visions and practices, without losing sight of constructive collaboration with other countries in research and production enterprises at all level. Studies by Ocholla (2000, 2005) and Snyman (2000) focusing on career opportunities in South Africa noted that beside career opportunities in libraries (which was the largest employer of LIS graduates in South African), there were rapidly growing career opportunities in the non – library sector or the emerging market. It is therefore right to note that Nigeria, does not present a different scenario. Hence the emerging   market is forcing most LIS schools to re- orient their curricula to the new market in order to survive.

## 3.1. Challenges

Despite all efforts to integrate ICT into the teaching and learning at all levels of LIS education, and beside all these turning point and opportunities for the modern librarianship, studies have shown that libraries, information centres and organizations in Nigeria are suffering from lack of adequate manpower to manage their resources effectively. According to Federal Ministry of Education (2009), Nigeria is experiencing a severe shortage of ICT skills and personal necessary for taking advantages of new and   emerging society. FME also listed other challenge to include inadequacy of qualified ICT  teachers and other ICT personnel,  low  retention of ICT staff, low ICT and ICT related research, inadequate funding of ICT for development and deployment as well as implementation of government policies on ICT, and the problem of power and energy.

Internet access is only a reality   for 20% of the world's population (LU, Fiuley and McConmack (2009) and Nigeria not an exception, in addition, Abubakar and Hassan (2010) present a plethora of problems as follow:

- Poor Governmental support for LIS schools
- Inadequacy of reliable infrastructure that will support the full incorporation of IT in the LIS schools.
- There is also the problem of lack of regular and continuous review of LIS curriculum in most Nigerian Schools.
- Lack of IT literate LIS educators in the country.
- Nonchalant attitude of the library associations to LIS education in Nigeria. To them  the various professional associations especially  the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the National Association of Library and Information  Science Educators (NALISE) and the Librarian  Registration Council of Nigeria  have not shown enough commitment  to the issue of LIS education in the country

## 3.2. Future direction

The use of ICT is beginning to get a wider appeal in LIS education in Nigeria. Today, the use of ICT to teach and plan   coursework, acquire, organize and disseminate information by libraries and information providers in general is now a common occurrence in LIS schools. Like various other developing countries, Nigeria is also taking numerous initiatives to build ICT

infrastructure. In line with this development, Okojie (2013) opined that it would involve organizing a workshop of heads of the 26 NUC apprised library schools, practicing librarians, students and other stakeholders to discuss the key issues in the sectors and agree to plan to turn around the education and training of librarians. Okojie further said that the review would also address such issues as competencies required, the facilities and the standards required for practicing librarianship in the country.

There is great need for all the curricular of LIS schools to be revised to incorporate ICT. In librarianship for example, school libraries engage in distance learning programmes, with a view to reduce the widening gap of the professional and practitioners. We are all encouraged in library profession to embrace this new trend. It is expected that this task of change will not be an easy one, as many librarians and information providers are sometimes reluctant to embrace change in curricula and pedagogical approaches.

There must be an action, through policy declaration by the government to build a critical mass of ICT proficiency and competences strategic and specialized ICT skills and requisite entrepreneurship skills among academic staff and start in library schools in Nigeria. The need has never been greater for the Federal Government to commit itself to providing policies and resources needed to fuel ICT innovation, to mitigate untended negative consequences from laws and regulations, and to continue to be a nation of lead innovators and users of ICT in Africa (Ejedafiru and Akporhonor, 2011). One way to achieving this, is by mandatory training programmes on ICT competences and proficiencies, which should be driven by the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria, Nigeria Library Association, National Universities Commission, the National Commission for Colleges of Education, the National Board for Technical Education respectively.

There is need to develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for all library schools, especially at the university level. M and E is vital to the success of integrating ICT in our library schools. There is no doubt that monitoring ICT initiatives in our library schools will ensure, that all actions are on track toward the vision. LU, Finley and Mc Cormack (2009) are of the opinion that monitoring and evaluating the ICT integration process can help all and Sundry indentify weakness or gaps in the process and assist with communicating effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, all supervising agencies Ministries of Education, NUC, LRCN, NLA, NALISE and all other stakeholders must develop frame work to carry out M& E for ICT compliance.

Good as the advent of ICT in our LIS educational systems may be, it also has its negative side. Today, with ICT we see all sorts of journals, especially online journals. Some of these journals demand very prohibitive publication fee. Worse still, some of these journals even request prospective authors to suggest assessors. Often, these authors submit names of their own colleagues, whom they expect would never return negative assessment. However, one way to ensure quality even with the advent of online journal is for regulatory bodies such as NUC, LRCN, and NLA to document accredited/approved journals in library and information science that academics in library profession are expected to publish in.

## 4. Recommendations

In other to address these anomalies and reposition LIS education for a 21st century profession, the following were recommended:

- There had been calls by many as cited by Eyitayo (2012), that "Library education programme in Nigeria, should be restructured for the realization of greater opportunities as the present structure of the curricula, lacks the basic fundamental skills, with, which the graduates of our library schools and departments can work effectively in non conventional library settings, (Okorafor and Iheaturu, 2005, Abubaka, 2010).
- The issues of realistic National Information and Communication Infrastructure Policy is one that no longer be allowed to linger unresolved. Hence, Ogunsola (2005) opined that Nigeria needs a goal-oriented policy as well as well-thought-out plans and strategies to harness the potential of ICT for national development.
- We need vibrant library schools and intellectually ready, and technology and business skills-oriented teachers to take Nigeria, through to the 20:2020 transformation agenda and beyond (Daniel, 2012).
- LIS schools should be more practical oriented in the delivery of ICT-based courses. LIS educators should be equipped, with necessary skills to move forward in line, with new shifts towards knowledge management, if they do not want to become obsolete.
- Library schools should develop robust policies on Open Access and Institutional Repositories. This will increase their visibility on the web as research output will be made more accessible on the web.
- Finally, National examination should be implemented to complement the professional education, this will help to check and control the quality of the profession.
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