# EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA: THEIR ROLE, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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**Abstract**

This paper discusses education as a tool for the training of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in Nigeria. Nigerian LIS professionals are expected to acquire skills that will enable them to locate and use information from print sources, computer and other storage media for effective information service delivery like their counterparts in other professions. By virtue of their training, Nigerian LIS professionals do not have to work only in established institutions after their training; they can establish their own businesses in library and information services. This paper therefore highlights the concept of education, need for education and training for LIS professionals, their role, career opportunities and challenges, the way forward and recommendations. It is therefore, recommended among others in this paper that the focus of Nigerian Library Schools' should be on the continuous revision of their curriculum content to reflect the demands of the immediate environment and international best practices.

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The need for education arose as early as man evolved in a society of fellow beings. Educators and educational philosophers, social reformers and political pace-setters have propounded many theories on what is the purpose of education (Orji, 1982). Education is the most important ingredient through which a nation can attain development (Kalisu, 2007). Since the early 1960's, many countries have tried to relate education to the need of the child, his community and his world (Fafunwa, 1991). There has been rising commitment to strengthening the delivery system of education in Nigeria. In the process of getting to the root of the educational problems of Nigeria, government since 1977 began searching for alternative models to the traditional system which was restricted and limited in space. Based on this, the need to create opportunities for those who have some form of formal education to update their knowledge and ultimately improve their productive capacity became more apparent. According to Nkanu and Usang (2007), Nigerians have absolute confidence in education as the spring-board for change and development.

On the strength of the philosophy of Nigeria's education system, the quality of education at all levels has been oriented towards inculcating appropriate educational aims to which the philosophy is linked. The attainment of these educational aims can be viewed from a broader perspective in the expectation that, for Nigeria education system to fully utilize available opportunities arising from the use of emerging technologies in the information age, the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) must be given top priority. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) must be seen as one of the most important tools that can influence positively education and all sectors of the society. However, acquisition of information literacy skills will assist Library and Information Science professionals to effectively apply ICT-based technologies to the provision of library and information services.

## Concept of Education

Conceptually, the task of defining "Education" is an extremely difficult one because the term is quite elusive and difficult to pin down to a single definition. Thus, one could see education as the total processes involved in developing human ability and behaviours (Ekpo, 1998). Consequent upon

the philosophy of Nigeria's education, the quality of education at all levels according to the National Policy on Education (2004), has been oriented towards appreciation of the national educational aims and objectives to which the philosophy is linked which include among others:

i.    The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
ii.   The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and
iii.  The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The attainment of these laudable educational aims, objectives, and goals can be viewed from a broader perspective in the light of the following expectations that:

a.  Education is a fundamental tool used for inculcating the requisite ethics, values, skills as well as techniques for the practice of any profession.
b.  Education serves as a vehicle for the attainment and recognition of the practitioners at the various levels of their professional strata (Mohammed, 2003).
c.  Education is an on-going process designed to acquire skills, understandings, healthy values and a spiritual balance to individuals so that they can develop themselves and the society in which they lived and operate.  (Denga, 1999)
d.  For Nigeria education system to fully utilize available opportunities arising from the use of emerging technologies in instructional delivery, the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) must be given top priority.

**A Peep into Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria**

Library and information science education is the study of organized collections of books and other non-book materials. Through this study, a person acquires approved skills, standard or level of attainment for maximum utilization of information resources in skills with which a learner, student, pupils, researcher of information must possess before being considered information literate (Etim, 2002). Library and information science can also be seen as the study of issues related to libraries and information services. This includes academic studies regarding how library resources are used, how people interact with library systems, and the organization of knowledge for efficient retrieval of relevant information. Librarianship is the application of library science which comprises the practical services rendered by librarians in their day-to-day attempts to meet the needs of library patrons or users. Therefore, a library and information scientist is an expert in the practical organization and retrieval of information in service to people with information needs. Before now, librarians were traditionally associated with collections of books; but now a modern library and information scientist deals with information in many formats such as compact discs, photographs, videotapes, newspapers, magazines bibliographic databases and Internet resources. (Igbeka, 2008).

Librarianship training started with short courses for library assistants (Utor, 2006).However, the urgent need for library and information science education in Nigeria soon became apparent immediately after the establishment, in 1948, of the first University College located at Ibadan. Prior to this time, of course, some learned libraries in research institutes and advanced colleges of science and technology have been developed and equally expanding their services. Several literatures abound that show that Nigeria is the cradle of LIS training in West Africa, and that formal education and training of Nigerian LIS professionals started in 1960 with establishment of the Institute of Librarianship (now the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies) in the University of Ibadan. Before this time, the professional training for Nigerian librarians was mainly in Britain where they were prepared for the British Associateship of Library Association (ALA) and Fellowship of Library Association (FLA). According to Ifidon (2008), the events that led to this development were the seminar on the development of Public Libraries in Africa in 1953, the founding of the West African Library Association (WALA) in 1954, and the Carnegie sponsored Harold Lancour's visit to West Africa in

1957. These resulted in the articulation for Librarians to play a significant role in the new Africa where the wind of change was blowing.

The pattern of the preparatory efforts to create a library school was first based on a regional basis, taking the whole of West Africa as a region for the purpose of library and information science education, and Nigeria (Ibadan) was the training centre where the school for English speaking West Africa librarians was established (Lawal, 2000). The training of librarians at Ibadan was at the leadership level, but nevertheless as the training was enhanced at the graduate level; it produced the first set of indigenous librarians for West Africa. The Bachelor of Library and Information Science training programme was pioneered in Nigeria at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1968. Since then, many other library schools in Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics have been involved in training LIS professionals at the Diploma, undergraduate and graduate levels. To date, there are several Universities and Polytechnics offering various programmes in library and information science in Nigeria (Aina, 2007 and Chukwuma-Nwosu, 2008).

**Need for Education and Training of LIS Professionals in Nigeria**

Education for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals has taken a new turn in the face of far-reaching developments sparked off by the trend towards globalization. Although the challenges for libraries in Africa have been enormous, they are not insurmountable given our human capacity to adapt to change. It is largely true that libraries in Africa are adapting to change particularly on innovations brought about by the application of ICT. LIS professionals are not only having to adapt to change in library services but also require in-depth and structured education and training programmes for occupation engagements in all library types. However, one important aspect of such professional discourses derive from the search for suitable, relevant academic and professional programmes is one that should be made available in our library schools in response to societal needs based on the various library types (Lawal, 2008).

The need for the provision of library and information science education and the acquisition of relevant knowledge, techniques and skills for effective and efficient library and information work is needed now more than before due to differences in library and information systems, services and infrastructure to cope with the changing needs and expectations of the 21$^{st}$ century people, societies, communities and institutions. (Mohammed, 2003). However, the quest for knowledge has been the central concern of man in every age and library services have been developed to facilitate the retrieval process of organized information as an integral part of the search for intellectual growth (Ikegbune, 1997). According to Ochai (2007), the library is a literacy-based facility, where the use of its contents presumes literacy on the part of the user. In spite of this, to the majority of Nigerian citizens libraries remain totally irrelevant. Nigerian LIS professionals have since recognized this fact and have gone further to publish articles on their revisionists approach in the provision of library services to the rural populace. Most organizations that exist in Nigeria have libraries which support the research activities of the parent organizations and also keep members of the organization abreast with recent developments in their fields of specialization. Mamman (2000) noted that, the digital or electronic library has come to stay therefore, Nigerian LIS professionals in libraries have to acquire modern information technologies if they are to be relevant to the society. These technologies have large storage capacities, the ability to store and disseminate information at incredible rate; they are versatile and are free of geographical barriers. This therefore makes the training of LIS professionals relevant

Agreeably, the emergence of a knowledge-based society in the 21$^{st}$ century poses new challenges to the Nigerian education system. Increasing globalization and rapid technological change now call for re-examination of education's pivotal role in Nigeria .On the strength of this in the information age, education must not only be seen as an initial activity preparing LIS professionals for productive life, but rather a continuous necessity for LIS professionals to cope with society's

changing needs. However, the provision and utilization of library and information science education world-wide and the acquisition of relevant knowledge, techniques and skills is predicated on the need for the provision of efficient library and information services and infrastructures to cope with the changing needs and expectations of the 21st century people, societies, communities and institutions (Mohammed, 2003).

For Nigerian LIS professionals to fully maximize their roles as information disseminators for the benefit of the society, they need education that will assist them to confidently demonstrate their competence and professional expertise to all. They need education that will stimulate their interest positively and sustain the awareness of their expected roles as information professionals in the development of every aspect of the Nigerian society (Akanni, 2008). With advances in ICT, co-operation and collaboration of libraries through inter-library loans system, the LIS profession is now a global issue. The application of ICT in libraries has widened the scope of library and information science profession and confers new roles on libraries. This situation has placed more demand on the ability of LIS professionals in the information age.

**Role and Opportunities for LIS Professionals in Providing Services to All**
Nigerian LIS professionals by virtue of their training can use knowledge in their jobs to advance the mission of the profession and their organizations even where they have to establish their own businesses. They can accomplish this through the development, deployment and management of information resources and services. Nigerian LIS professionals have a vital role to play in the present society known as knowledge society. They can be involved in creation of consulting services to handle library-based and online information resources, development of library information research projects, creation of library training programmes, establishment of intranet services, creation of librarian web, intranet site, and organization of professional staff to handle specialized tasks (Okere and Ekere, 2008). Having undergone specialized training, they are expected to be skillful in the complex art of managing human and material resources, information packaging, library repositioning, strategic planning, budgeting and effective allocation of funds among competing needs. It is incumbent on Nigerian LIS professionals to upgrade their technical and human relations skills to remain relevant in the profession and attractive to the patrons of libraries and information centres (Nkiko and Ilo, 2006)

Amidst the competitive demands of the information age, Nigerian LIS professionals must be used to and familiar with the wide range of databases available and use them extensively in satisfying users information needs. There are expected to be chief facilitators of the process of information storage, packaging and transfer among individuals and groups, assist in developing websites for their libraries and provide detailed information of their reference sources and services on the website. As they engage in websites creation, they usually would take into consideration collections, publications, catalogues of individual libraries around the world and Nigeria in particular (Mole, 2006). Usually their role will become more prominent as educators, information managers, information providers, publishers, archivists, records managers, intelligence information officers, editors, dealers in information media etc. As trained professionals, they can increase awareness among clients of available information networks and assist them in the content and usage of reference information network. Nigerian LIS professionals who are proficient in internet search have always been educating their professional colleagues through professional continuing education. Therefore, as information management consultants, they can assist network users to build and maintain personal information systems which provide access to the subset of networked information resources relevant to each user's work. As information providers, they can make available a wide range of publications and access formats from remote log-in to catalogues and indexes and provision of electronic copies of entire collection or works, in print or other formats.

Awareness of the role of professionally training LIS professionals is increasing across the nations and around the world. Any place information needs to be gathered, organized, analyzed, synthesized, stored or distributed is a place that needs a LIS professional. According to Felix (2005), the variety of places is almost limitless. LIS professionals are needed in the Senate, National Assembly, government ministries, commissions, agencies and parastatals, Law courts, Law schools, Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of education, Colleges of Agriculture, Secondary schools, Marine and Oceanography, War Colleges, Research Institutes, Banks, at the Headquarters of Oil companies, professional bodies such as Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), The Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN), the Pharmaceutical Association of Nigeria (PAN) etc. Onadiran (1996) noted that, the need to expand the market for library school products and to ensure adequate supply of professionals is of paramount importance to the library school educators. Increasingly, the school seemed to view education for librarianship as preparing individuals to provide information services, products and management regardless of institutional setting or particular application. According to Igbeka (2008), Nigerian LIS professionals do not only have to work in established institutions, they can establish their own libraries or information centres and become information brokers or business librarians who can search and find information for users for a fee. They can also work as corporate librarians in large companies or corporate bodies where they can be members of management by managing knowledge for these bodies.

There are many career opportunities available to Nigerian LIS professionals in the information age. Though in Nigeria, it appears graduates of Library and Information Science have narrowed down into mainly working in established/institutionalized libraries or information centres, when the skills they acquired is also for self-employment (i.e. towards establishing businesses of their own.) Igbeka (2008) further noted that, Sellen (1980), Warnker (1981) and Afolabi (1998) identified numerous information related careers that LIS professionals could enter with specific reference to the African situation. This is to help Nigeria LIS professionals who want to start their own businesses or work in established institutions to choose what area they may be interested in. Osagie (2000) maintained that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) is fore-sighted enough to realize that globalization is bound to influence in a radical manner, the role of Nigerian LIS professionals and libraries. It is expected that educating Nigerian LIS professionals will facilitate the repositioning of Nigerian libraries to meet the technological challenges encountered in the process of globalization. It will also stimulate Nigerian LIS professionals to acquire the skills and capabilities necessary for effective participation in a globalized world. Through training, it is now possible for Nigerian LIS professionals to transfer vast quantities of text and statistics from one computer to the other using the facilities of the Internet and E-mail in libraries. These recent technological developments have revolutionized the practice of library and information science profession in the developed world and would eventually do so in Nigeria. In communities where telecommunications and power infrastructure are reliable and effectively run, it is now possible to access library materials in far away countries without leaving one's study or place of study.

Traditionally, the Nigerian LIS professional performs the following functions:- acquisition of reading materials, custody of reading materials, facilitation of location and borrowing of reading materials, provision of reading rooms, provision of photocopying facilities, organization of inter-library lending of books, preparation of bibliographies on specific topics. The education of LIS professionals presents new roles which make them become facilitators. These include computerization of all library acquisitions, establishment of www site where computerized materials can be accessed, enabling users to access information from other libraries through installed IT, assisting researchers prepare comprehensive and complete bibliographies, assisting students to access materials placed on reading lists by lecturers, fund-raising to support services provided in areas of information packaging, library repositioning, strategic planning, budgeting and effective allocation of funds among competing needs. Well trained Nigerian LIS professionals must be competent in manual library routines with

exposure to library automation of library services in the library school. They can become computer operators and instructors that can order books from vendors through the Internet with the aid of computers and also provide computerized cataloguing and reference services to their clients with sophisticated tasks for information delivery. Education and training of Nigerian LIS professionals now promotes operation efficiency in Nigerian libraries and understanding of the theories of library practice and how to apply them. They have been thought to apply the theories, methods, and rules applied to book selection, acquisition, cataloguing and classification processes, care and use of library materials, maintenance of library records, bibliographic compilation, etc. As trained indexers and audio-visual specialists, Nigerian LIS professionals are expected to acquire the skills to classify documents on the basis of their subjects' content and construct indexes to facilitate their retrieval based on the prevailing technology.

By virtue of their training, Nigerian LIS professionals will not be contented with mere alphabetical listings of authors' names for the purpose of identifying persons or corporate bodies that are responsible for the intellectual contents of recorded information, they will also be engaged in the production of audio-visual materials like slides, films, audio/video recordings, overhead transparencies, etc. instead of importing them abroad. It is normal that the Nigerian information society also expect these professionals to provide reprographic, processing and printing services to its members. This equally means that they to show clearly their unique role in the establishment of mental contact between authors and readers as well as bibliopsychologist regardless of their physical separation by time and geographical location.

**Challenges for Nigerian LIS Professionals in the Information Age**
1.  One of the greatest challenges facing Nigerian LIS professionals in the information age is that, up till this moment, the LIS profession is still somewhat misunderstood by a proportion of the Nigerian public who perceived the LIS professionals as a mere "keeper of books" who only selects, collects, classifies, catalogues, stores and disseminates materials that are adjudged to be of concern to that segment of the population which uses library services.
2.  Most challenging also is that, globalization is impacting on the various aspects of the Nigerian LIS professional's environment. It has created a situation where the prevailing level of professional practice places a demand on all the LIS professionals to equip themselves with the requisite skills of acting as navigators in the information superhighway. Hence, Nigerian LIS professionals must for the future be prepared to face squarely the challenges posed by globalization by beginning now to play leading role by appreciating the emerging benefits through utilization of ICTs to the library and society. This will be achieved when education is adjudged by LIS professionals as the most viable platform and tool through which globalization challenges can be contended with.
3.  Most Nigerian LIS professionals are still not fully aware that the technology driven processes of today's world will most likely lead to a situation where those without technological skills (i.e.ICT compliant) will be rendered unemployed and unemployable in the future.

**The Way Forward**
1.  Contending with the obvious challenges posed by globalization presupposes that, education acquired by LIS professionals in Nigeria must be broad-based, and be such that will make them versatile in all information related fields. Thus, acquisition of computers for professional services must be seen as base-line tool to achieve this feat. Okoli (2005) was that, the LIS professional of today must be conversant with computer technology hardware/software such as printers, scanners, CD-ROM databases, electronic mails, electronic publishing, electronic bulletin boards, teleconferencing etc. By implication, computers play many roles in LIS professional's operational

environment. Therefore, for LIS professionals to integrate and interact meaningfully with patrons in computer-based libraries of today, they need to be computer literate and acquire competence in computer application in the areas of networking, Internet search, website creation etc.

2. In this 21st century, the role of the Nigerian LIS professional has been re-defined as a result of the emergence of ICTs. As a matter of fact, recent developments in the library scene, particularly in information management and technology have put more responsibilities into the hands of LIS professionals and in such a magnitude that the senses of the laymen cannot understand. Agaja (1997) was that, with basic training in LIS profession (which today is ICT bias) in the library schools, Nigerian LIS professionals will be well equipped to function as managers, computer operators, indexers, and audio-visual manufacturers and specialists, etc.

3. Since the emerging market provides job outlets for Nigerian LIS professionals, who in addition to the basic library skills they possessed, are also good at ICT, publishing, archives and records management, public relations/advocacy and basic statistics skills. Aina (2007) was that, courses such as basic computer skills, computer applications (word processing, spread sheet, databases management systems), networking, Internet surfing and web design, publishing, public relations, editing, writing advocacy, conservation and preservation, theories of archives and records management courses should be offered in Nigerian library schools and also papers presented during conferences, seminars and workshops should be aimed at further exposing Nigeria LIS professionals to the realities of the information age.

4. Also, information for rural community could be an attractive job market for Nigerian LIS professionals, especially at local governments level, community based organizations, and political constituencies. Most important is that the skills of LIS professionals would be needed in HIV/AIDS activities, agricultural extension services, public health, etc. Aina (2007) is also of the view that, the Nigerian LIS professional is expected to possess skills in repacking of information, management and operation of audio-visual equipment, documentation of indigenous knowledge, preservation and conservation of records, provision of query and answers service in the communities.

5. The rate of expansion of traditional library jobs is so slow compared with non-traditional library information jobs which are expanding at an exponential rate. Nigerian LIS professionals should have no option than to tap heavily into the non-traditional jobs, hence Library and Information educators should ensure that the curriculum in Nigerian library schools is designed to accommodate modern changes prevalent now in the information profession in Nigerian since the infusion of ICT into all human activities has completely changed the practice of library science all over the world.

**Conclusion**

Nigerian Library and Information Science professionals need professional education that will sustain their search skills abilities and facilitate the exploitation of the content of their library's collection regardless of the medium in which that content is acquired and stored. Ever since the early days of their history, libraries have always consisted of a mix of media of communication which in today's world include print, sound, video, CD-ROM, and knowledge on how to use the traditional skills to manipulate the new networks to generate electronic information become very necessary for libraries of the 21st century. Nigerian LIS professionals as stake-holders in the information profession need to understand that the technology-driven processes of today's world would most likely lead to a situation in which those without technological skills are rendered unemployed and unemployable in the future. This simply means that, Nigerian LIS professionals must function completely within their sphere of authority to ensure efficient flow, distribution and utilization of information materials to prospective users.

**Recommendations**

It is true that, the emergence of a knowledge-based society poses new challenges to the Nigerian education system. Viewed from current trends in information development, Nigerian LIS professionals are expected to put to effective use the skills they have acquired while in training in order to cope with the challenges of globalization. To achieve this therefore:

a. The focus of Nigerian Library schools' should be on the continuous revision of their curriculum content to reflect the demands of the immediate environment and international best practices.

b. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should collaborate with National Universities Commission (NUC) in the supervision of library schools' programmes to ensure quality assurance and uniformity in standards as this will guarantee full accreditation of library schools programmes so that LIS graduates are not only proficient in library and information science but also in ICT application in their operational environments.

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