ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM IN TWO LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (LIS) SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Changes in the LIS curriculum especially in this digital age has become a constant phenomenon globally. However, in the developing countries like Nigeria, it has been relatively very slow due to the low level of infrastructural development. Consequently, there is a need for the blending of traditional and modern courses in the curricula of the LIS schools in the country. This study investigates the opinions of academic staff in two (2) LIS schools in Nigeria regarding the quality of the undergraduate LIS curricula and the roles played by the employers of the LIS graduates in curricula matters. A descriptive survey research technique was used in the study, with the data collected through the use of questionnaire. The findings reveal that respondents indicated that the curricula of their LIS schools contained minimal Information Technology (IT) courses. Majority of them indicated that they were involved in the curriculum review process in their respective LIS schools. However, the study also revealed that the employers of the LIS graduates were not involved in the curriculum review process of their employees' LIS schools. Recommendations were made based on the results of this study.*

Keywords: *Quality Assessment, Undergraduate Curriculum, Nigerian Library Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the advances in information technology have greatly influenced the various aspects of the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession, including education and training. LIS schools and educators are therefore, facing unprecedented challenges that have been brought about by the information technology revolution. This, therefore, requires them to make changes and adjustments in their curricula in order to meet up with the expected changes. Ameen (2007) noted that responding to information needs of the evolving and sophisticated societies, changes in the curricula, school names, and the job market has been a constant phenomenon in the LIS discipline at the global level. LIS schools, then, more than ever before, inevitably, seems to face more fundamental challenges that centered on the need for them to adapt to the new circumstances that demands new competencies and skills in the new millennium. Keeping this reality in view, Warraich and Ameen (2011) pointed out that the focus

of the LIS education in the 21stcentury is to develop competent and skilled human resources to meet the changing needs of the digital environment.

Thus, due to heightened need for quality and ICT skilled graduates, LIS schools are expected to develop new strategies in the form of new courses formation to ensure that their graduates are fully equipped with the requisite knowledge and transferrable skills in order to respond to the changing landscape. According to Noh, Ahn and Choi (2012), as traditional libraries changes into highly modernized ones, such as semantic libraries, semantic digital libraries, and libraries 3.0, the need for transformation in the library and information science curricula to foster information professionals who will be able to manage such libraries and provide appropriate user services is more intense than ever. As a dynamic discipline, therefore, it is worth noting that today's LIS educators are facing different challenges than their predecessors in teaching tomorrow's LIS professionals. Therefore, this study seeks to survey the views of LIS educators and employers on the quality of the undergraduate curriculum in their respective LIS schools. The study was exploratory in nature that also seeks to stimulate further discussion on the LIS education and curricula in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of LIS curriculum is of growing and increasing concerns to the global LIS community. This is evident by the amount and substantial body of literature available on the topic. Hence, the professional discussions and literature focused on the key skills and competencies required by the ever changing LIS job market which the LIS curriculum is expected to address. Buarki, Hepworth and Murray (2011), observed that as new ICT skills are identified, the Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum need to be revised and up-dated to incorporate ICT courses. In addition, according to them, academics and the LIS schools need to realize the needs for ICT and other relevant skills from different stakeholders so as to incorporate them in their syllabus. Moreover, issues relating to the direction of LIS programmes, curriculum changes, subjects to be included, as well as the required knowledge and skills LIS graduates should possess have been extensively discussed in the professional literature (Xu, 2003).

Generally, the concept of curriculum denotes a standardized ground covered by students in their pursuit towards attaining certain educational levels. Although, many scholars considered the term as vague, or elusive that is not easily defined. A curriculum, according to Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2009), is "the plans made for guiding learning in the schools, normally represented in retrievable documents of several levels of generality, and the actualization of those plans in the classroom, as experienced by the learners and as recorded by an observer; those experiences that normally take place in a learning environment that also manipulates what is learned". McDonald and Van der Horst (2007) defined curriculum as anything that denotes not only content, but also that which is important to the teaching and learning of the programmes of study in institutions, outcomes, methods, and assessment procedures all form an integral part of the curriculum. Recently, Chu (2010) noted that in any educational programme, the curriculum is the best barometer of its nature and content.

Furthermore, curriculum development is a process whereby the choices of designing a learning experience for students are made and then activated through a series of coordinated activities

(Wiles and Bondi, 2007). On the other hand, Tomkins and Case (2011), regarded curriculum development as the systematic planning of what is taught and learned in schools as mirrored in the courses of study and school' programmes.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that curriculum development involves continuous expansion and revision of course contents in a particular programme to ensure that they keep pace with the demands of the job market. More often than not, the curriculum needs to be regularly scrutinized to ensure that it comply with the pace of changes in a given profession. The same situation applies to the LIS educational programmes.

Several studies relating to the LIS curriculum have been carried out. In other words, recent reviews of the LIS curriculum literature revealed a plethora of researches. However, the following most relevant studies have been examined.

Sanders (2008) studied the current demands and future need of undergraduate LIS education in Australia through a web-based survey of employers of LIS graduates, in order to find out whether they were relevant or not. His study found that majority of the respondents said that the undergraduate education provided equipped graduates with the needed attributes required by a professional librarian. In terms of curriculum, a number of employers pointed out that recent graduates were lacking in some areas of professional knowledge. His study suggested the need for curriculum reform in that country.

In a related manner, Anna (2011) examined the Information Technology components in the curricula of 8 universities offering undergraduate degrees in LIS in Indonesia. She conducted an observation of the websites of individual universities, and carried out interviews with some faculty members of the LIS schools. She found that, the curricula of the 8 universities had IT components, and therefore, suggested that more IT courses should be included in the curricula of the LIS schools.

In a most recent study, Singh and Mehra (2012) undertook an exploratory study aimed at examining the status of Information Technology (IT) skills and competencies in the curricula of top 25 LIS schools in the United States. Their study which employed content analysis of the curricula documents of the LIS schools, found that the strongest areas of technological competencies present in the curricula were database management systems and automation systems. While, the weakest areas were e-mail programmes, presentation programmes, e-resources management, as well as core hardware/core software and core operating systems which were not taught in the majority of the LIS schools studied. They, however, recommended some competency areas to be included in the curricula which comprise e-resources management, core web tools, public access computing, technology policies, as well as advanced hardware.

Pradeepa (2009) analyzed the LIS education programmes in eight educational institutions in Sri Lanka with the aim of determining the curriculum development strategy of those LIS programmes. He found that, six main subjects were taught across most of the LIS programmes, and also most of the curricular documents were not comprehensive. The study similarly found

out that Sri Lankan LIS curriculum developers did not use any formal curriculum development model in the design of the curricula.

Kigongo-Bukenya (2003) undertook a comparative investigation of the curricula of the East African School of Library and Information Science in Uganda, with the departments of Library and Information Studies at the Universities of Wales, Botswana and Cape Town. The study employed multiple approaches through the use of questionnaires, interviews, observations, focused group interviews, as well as debates. The findings indicated the need for curricula policy, enhancement of programme contents both academic and the ICT aspects, the need for indigenization and harmonization of the LIS programmes, the adoption of different teaching methods, improvement of space, teaching, research and ICT facilities. Besides, there was the need for the introduction of practicum in the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS).

Varalakshmi's (2006) study assessed the perceptions of employers and alumni about LIS curricula in India with a view to determine the relevance, employability, and sufficiency of the knowledge gained in order to cope with professional duties. The study which also sought for employers' expectations regarding education and training of the LIS professionals in the 21st century, established that employers were not satisfied with the curricula which according to them was insufficient in the area of IT, and that it was neither relevant nor adequate to the nature of the market needs.

Nonthacumjane (2011) offered a list of key skills and competencies of new generation LIS professionals. She categorized the vital skills needed by the new LIS professionals in the digital age as: personal skills, generic skills, and discipline-specific knowledge. She concluded by emphasizing that, in order for the new information professionals to work competently and effectively in the fast-changing digital age, they should have the necessary qualifications.

In another recent study, Mahmood and Shafique (2012) studied the alumni of the MLIS programme of the University of Punjab, Pakistan, with the purpose of reviewing and improving the MLIS programme of the university. Their research found that, the "alumni were carrying out a wide variety of tasks in their job situations. They in addition perceived that, traditional courses were useful in their current jobs, so also were some IT and communication related courses. Furthermore, respondents stressed the need for new teaching and delivery methods in addition to the routine class lectures, as well as stating that the quality of the MLIS programme would get better if lecturers receive training according to the changing trends in the LIS profession."

As a prelude to the main study on the investigation of the quality of the undergraduate curriculum of LIS schools in Nigeria, a study was conducted between the months of October, 2009 to February, 2010. The study involved two (2) LIS schools i.e. the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), and the Bayero University (BUK) LIS schools. The survey questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Likewise, the questionnaires sought to obtain information on the curricular issues and other related matters. Such issues include demographic factors, IT contents in the undergraduate curricula, and participation in curriculum review. Others were employers' participation in

curriculum development and review, satisfaction with the undergraduate curriculum, as well as problems affecting the undergraduate programmes of the LIS schools.

A total of 20 questionnaires were administered to the respondents. All the questionnaires were retrieved and used for the analysis. The results and discussion of the data collected is presented below:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

The demographic information of the respondents collected were gender, age, educational qualifications, years of experience in the LIS schools, and position of the academic staff.

Gender

The data collected indicated that majority 17 (85%) were males, while very few 3 (15%) were females. This indicates that there were more male lecturers than their female counterpart in the LIS schools.

Age

With regard to the distribution of the respondents by their age, the data collected indicated 8 (40%) were in the age range of 41-50 years. While 6 (30%) were between 51-60 years, and 4 (20%) were aged between 30-40 years. Similarly, only 2 (10%) were within 60 years and above. This indicates that many lecturers in the LIS Schools were in the middle age category.

Educational Qualifications

In respect to the educational background of the respondents, the data collected revealed that majority 17 (85%) had MLS/MLIS. Whileless than half 3 (15%) had PhD's. This implies that majority of the academic staff hold masters' degrees.

Years of Experience/Position of theAcademic Staff

In terms of years of teaching experience of the lecturers', less than half 5 (25%) of the respondents had 21 years or above that. Another 5 (25%) had between 1-5 years, while 4 (20%) had 16-20 years. Similarly, another 4 (20%) indicated 6-10 years. The least 2 (10%) had between 11-15 years teaching experience.

With regard to position or status of the academic staff, the data indicated that less than half 7 (35%) held the position of Senior Lecturer. Similarly, 5 (25%)were in the position of Assistant Lecturer, while 4 (20%) were in the Lecturer I cadre. The least were Associate Professor 2 (10%), and Lecturer II 2 (10%).This invariably indicates that there were more Senior Lecturers that were involved in the survey. Table 1 provides the summary of the years of experience/position of the academic staff.

Table 1: *Teaching Experience/Position*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	5	25
6-10 years	4	20
11-15 years	2	10
16-20 years	4	20
21 years and above	5	25
Total		**100.0**
Position		
Assistant Lecturer	5	25
Lecturer II	2	10
Lecturer I	4	20
Senior Lecturer	7	35
Associate Professor/Reader	2	10
Professor	-	-
Total		**100.0**

IT CONTENT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the contents of their LIS schools undergraduate curricula contained Information Technology (IT) courses. Findings in table 2 below indicate that all the respondents (100%) revealed that the curricula had some IT based courses. However, there were variations regarding the extent to which the curricula contained those courses. Nine (45%) the IT courses were minimal, 6 (30%) indicated that the IT courses were maximally present. While on the other hand, the least was 5 (25%) indicated moderate.

Table 2: IT Content in the UG Curriculum

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
IT Content of UG Curriculum		
Yes	20	100
No	0	0.00
Total	**20**	**100**
*Extent of IT in UG Curriculum		
Maximal	6	30
Moderately	5	25
Minimal	9	45
Total	**20**	**100**

IT COURSES TAUGHT IN THE LIS SCHOOLS

With reference to the IT courses taught in the LIS schools, respondents were asked to indicate the IT courses in the curricula of their LIS schools. The majority of the respondents 19 (95%) indicated Electronic Information Resources/Digital Information, Introduction to ICTs 18 (90%), while Computer Application Programmes had 16 (80%), and Library Automation 16 (80%). On the other hand, the least course that was indicated by the respondents was 1 (5%) software development. The summary of the findings is in table 3 below.

Table 3: IT Courses Taught

Variables	Yes (%)	No (%)
Introduction to ICTs	90	10
Computer Practical	50	50
Internet Technologies	30	70
Electronic Information Resources/Digital Information	95	5
Computer Application Programmes	80	20
Library Automation	80	20
Management of Library Automation	15	85

Network and Networking Skills	30	70
Data Communication	10	90
Software development	5	95

PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM REVIEW AND NUMBER OF TIMES LIS SCHOOLS REVIEWED CURRICULAR

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had participated in the curriculum review and evaluation in their LIS schools (Table 5). Majority 12 (60%) of the respondents indicated that they had participated, while on the other hand, 8 (40%) indicated non-participation. Furthermore, the respondents were further asked to indicate the number of times their LIS schools reviewed their curricula since the establishment of the LIS schools. The results revealed that 10 (50%) indicated 3 times, 4 (20%) pointed out that curricula was reviewed twice. While, 6 (30%) indicated that they had no idea. The above findings indicate that academic staff participates in curriculum review exercise in their LIS schools. The summary is shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: Participation in Curriculum Review/Number of Times

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Participation in CR/Evaluation		
Yes	12	60
No	8	40
Total	20	100
Number of Times Curricula were Reviewed		
Once	-	-
Twice	4	20
Three Times	10	50
5 times and above	-	-
I don't Know	6	30
Total	20	100

EMPLOYERS'OF LIS GRADUATES PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

The study further sought to find out whether employers' of the LIS graduates were involved in curriculum development and reviewed exercises in the LIS schools. The results show that

majority 14 (70%) indicated that employers were not involved, while on the other hand, 5 (25%) indicated that the employers were involved. However, this finding was most surprising, considering the crucial role of the employers in the LIS field. Nonetheless, similar findings was reported by Edzan and Abdullah (2003, p.7) in Malaysia who found that, "curriculum development in LIS was done in isolation by the institutions running the various programmeswithout any form of consultation with the potential employers." Also, Pradeepa (2009), found the absence of contributions of employers and other stakeholders in the curriculum development process in Sri Lankan LIS programmes.

Table 5: Employers Involvement in Curriculum Development and Review

VARIABLES	(%)
Involved	25
Not involved	70
No answer Given	5
Total	100

Satisfaction with the Undergraduate Curriculum of the LIS Schools

With reference to the respondents level of satisfaction with their school's undergraduate curricula used for training in those LIS schools, the results demonstrate that majority 7 (35%) indicated moderate satisfaction. This is closely followed by highly satisfactory 5 (25%), satisfactory 5 (25%). While 2 (10%) indicated that they were not satisfied with their school's undergraduate curriculum. Table 5 below provides the summary of the findings.

Table 6: Level of Satisfaction with the Undergraduate Curriculum

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Satisfactory	5	25
Moderately Satisfactory	7	35
Satisfactory	5	25
Fairly Satisfactory	1	5
Not Satisfactory	2	10
Total	20	100

PROBLEMS AFFECTING UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM OF THE LIS SCHOOLS

Respondents were asked through an open-ended question to mention the problems affecting undergraduate curriculum of their LIS schools. The respondents indicated a number of challenges. On top of the list were the problems of inadequate funding. Other problems revealed by the respondents were:

- Insufficient Infrastructure and facilities
- Inadequate staffing
- Non-correspondence with reality of the changing world
- Delays/non- implementation of the curricular
- Lack of constant review of the curriculum
- Lack of commitment by the LIS faculty
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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The views from this investigation indicated that having a quality and richer LIS curriculum is a critical necessity for all LIS programmes irrespective of their placement or location.

For a meaningful LIS education at the undergraduate level, and all other levels in Nigeria in this 21st century, this paper proposes that:

i.   The two LIS schools studied should reinvent their curricular to incorporate more ICT courses. Similarly, the government and the university managements should provide more support to ensure the provision of all appropriate infrastructures and facilities for curricula implementation.

ii.   The LIS schools should ensure that curricula are reviewed on regular basis to ensure compliance with the current happenings globally. There is also the need for its total and effective implementation.

iii. There is the need for involvement of all relevant stakeholders, especially the employers in curriculum development and review. The LIS schools should equally recruit dynamic faculty members with strong background in ICTs to make the programmes more competitive.

Education for the LIS profession has changed rapidly in this 21st century which has resulted in transformations in all its major facets. As such, it is expected that the LIS professional of the 21st century should be well grounded in the theoretical and practical aspects of the field as it concerns the society in which he or she will function. Similarly, they are expected to be aware and conversant with the global issues concerning LIS discipline, especially in relation to ICTs.

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