Curricular Implications of Sustainable Development for Library and Information Science Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the implications of sustainable development for the curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria. Global attention to sustainable development has heightened with the adoption of the seventeen sustainable development goals in 2015. Library and Information professionals are expected to provide adequate information services in the realization of these goals and in the pursuit of the larger sustainable development project. The curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria must therefore, be adequate to enable students acquire the salient knowledge and skills for effective performance in their future work places. Particularly, courses in Information Communication Technology (ICT) should be emphasized in curricula reviews in Nigeria since skills in ICT are indispensable for efficient service delivery in the modern times. It is also important to adjust the curriculum to factor in relevant issues in sustainable development to boost the students' grasp of the concept and thus develop their interest in its pursuit through committed professional service.

Keywords: Curriculum review; Library and Information Science education; Sustainable development; Sustainable development goals; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Nigeria.

1. Introduction

A common thread that runs through the core interests of most governments all over the world is development. Progressive governments around the world are desirous of enhancement in all sectors of their national lives and therefore, they formulate policies and initiate programmes to achieve this. Sometimes, the achieved development leaves grave consequences for succeeding generations. However, beginning in the 1970's and heightening since the 1990's, the concept of sustainable development has come to caution against development at the expense of the future. The core concern of sustainable development is the pursuit of development through means devoid of potential injury to future generations. It is a global project championed by the United Nations.

Sustainable development has been the focus of several world summits. Earlier summits were skewed toward environmental issues, but more recent ones have given a balanced attention to the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. In 2000, the Millennium Summit was held in New York at which the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted with achievement target year as 2015. As the target year was ending, world leaders reconverged in New York for the Sustainable Development Summit during which seventeen new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted to succeed the MDGs. The sustainable development goals are:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

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6. Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality in and among countries.
11. Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.
15. Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.
17. Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (www.un.org).

These are well-thought out goals that address critical needs in the society. How relevant the library and information profession proves in the realization of these goals will determine the level of appreciation of the profession by the society. It becomes crucial therefore, that the Library and Information profession in Nigeria strategizes on effective ways of supporting the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria as scheduled. Professional library and information services are provided by persons who had been through a rigorous programme of Library and Information Science (LIS) education in accredited library schools. Their effectiveness in the work place is largely a reflection of the effectiveness of their educational preparation. That explains the dominance of quality assurance in LIS education in discussions in professional circles, in recent years. Perhaps a reflection of an understanding of its centrality in LIS education, curriculum attracts interest more than other quality assurance factors. Curriculum is the totality of the learning experience to which students are exposed. Curriculum is expressed in courses and their content.

Over the years, the curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria has proved very elastic as new courses have been introduced or old ones expanded in line with relevant developments in the society. With the pervasive global focus on sustainable development and with the expectation that the products of LIS schools will play active roles in the attainment of the sustainable development goals, what further adjustments can be made in the curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria to reflect sensitivity to the subject? This is what the paper intends to explore. However, the following section is intended to provide an insight into earlier concerns about, and adjustments on the curriculum for LIS education in Nigeria, thought as a necessary prelude to the proposal in this paper.

2. Review of Literature on Curriculum Adjustment in Library Education in Nigeria

The initial curriculum implemented at the first library school in Nigeria, the Institute of Librarianship, and Ibadan at inception in 1960 was the British Associate of Library Association's Syllabus (Mohammed, 2003).With increasing national consciousness, and in line with the indigenization processes in various facets of the nation, the Institute revised its curriculum in 1963 "to reflect African needs" (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). Notwithstanding this early effort to design a curriculum with African needs in view, Lawal (2003) still observes a high foreign influence on the curricula of library schools in Nigeria. Benge (1978) argues that Nigerian library schools have not sufficiently reflected local relevance in their programmes. This view appears popular among observers of the library education landscape in the 1980's. Thus, according to Ochai (1987), two national conferences were held in Kano and Zaria in 1984 and 1985 respectively on the theme, "Toward relevance in library education in Nigeria" to reexamine the curricula of library education with the aim of making them relevant to national needs. However, Mohammed and Otim, cited in Lawal (2003) show evidence of indigenization of curriculum at the Department of Library and Information Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where 'Sociology of Library Science' and 'History of Books and Libraries' are taught in the context of Nigeria's social milieu.

As the 20th century was drawing to a close, the information technology revolution hit the library world, engendering sustained calls for inclusion of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) courses in the training programmes of library schools in Nigeria. Ogunsheye and Aboyade (1974 p.16) observe: It has become increasingly clear that the librarian of the next decade will need not only knowledge and skills in traditional librarianship but new skills in the use of modern technology for handling information.

They are invariably advocating a Library and Information Science education programme with adequate ICT component. The contributions of Adimorah (2002) and Ejiko (2002) to the conference on "Modernization of Library and Information Science programmes in Nigerian universities" organized by the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE) place developments in information technology at the centre of the need for adjustments in the curriculum for LIS education in Nigeria. Nwokocha (2002) reports the curriculum restructuring and modernization at the Department of Library and Information Science, Abia State University, Uturu, necessitated by the 'over bearing influence of Information Technology (IT) in information delivery world and the frightening response to LIS graduate employers in the run-up to the millennium'. Balarabe (200 p.iv) studied the global information technology and its implication for university-based library education in Nigeria, finding out in part that "the curriculum of Library and Information Science education could not keep pace with the rapid developments characterizing the present information technology era and the changing needs of library and information services in the country". In view of this finding, he recommends "curricular reforms in response to the continuous challenges posed by information technology to the Library and Information Science world" (Balarabe, 2004 p.iv). In a subsequent study, Balarabe (2005 p.7) concludes from his findings that "Nigerian LIS curriculum is less responsive to the emerging trends in the information age". He thus recommends the expansion of LIS curriculum to include management information systems and services, network and networking, communication, computers and automation of library, web-page management, e-publishing, and management of virtual library system. Quite significant also, is the contribution of Aina (2007) to the need for curriculum adjustment in LIS education in Nigeria. Noting the revolutionary change in library practice brought about by the infusion of ICT into all human activities, he regrets that the curricula of library schools in Nigeria have not responded positively to these changes. He therefore designs and offers for adoption, what he believes is 'an appropriate curriculum for LIS schools in Nigeria'; this is a four-year bachelor's degree programme which blends traditional Library Science courses with new ones, reflecting modern trends in LIS education and professional practice.

While the issues bordering on ICT integration into LIS curriculum continue to engage the attention of scholars, the concern for a curriculum that equips students with entrepreneurial skills saturates current literature. Nwosu (2013) adduces reasons why the introduction of entrepreneurship training in LIS education in Nigeria is imperative. She believes that entrepreneurship in LIS education is the solution to the perennial complaint of joblessness by LIS graduates since it equips them with entrepreneurial skills to be self-reliant. For Abubakar and Farouk (2016), a robust and well-balanced LIS curriculum in Nigeria must include courses in entrepreneurial skills to prepare graduates to be self-reliant. They suggest such courses as business skills, information brokering, critical, reflective and creative thinking and strategic planning. Other courses they recommend to curriculum developers for inclusion in LIS curriculum include knowledge management, ICT skills (networking, Internet searching skills, database, Online reference chart) information literacy, information systems, publishing, multi-media application, electronic resources management, management sciences, management of digital libraries and digital preservations, and information management and sources in various information organizations.

Furthermore, Igwe, Ugwuogu, Nworu, Akubue and Ume (2016) report the curricular adjustment done at the Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Nigeria, by infusing entrepreneurship courses into the curriculum. Some of the courses added are: Perspectives and opportunities in Library and Information Science, Knowledge management, Information products and services, Advocacy, Marketing and Public Relations, and Inforpreneurship and Small Business Management. Similarly, Aina (2014) reports the curriculum enrichment at the LIS Department, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, to prepare students for local and global job markets upon graduation. In a comparative analysis of the curriculum prescribed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the curriculum designed by the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Ilorin, he notes that certain courses required to furnish salient skills for contemporary library and information services, are absent in the NUC curriculum, but are included in the University of Ilorin's curriculum. Some of those courses are on entrepreneurship, knowledge management, mass communication, and ICT. Underscoring the significance of entrepreneurship training in LIS education in Nigeria, Nwokocha and Ochogwu (2015), state in a communiqué developed at the end of the NALISE conference on "Training the Library and Information Science students for Entrepreneurship in the 21st century" as follows:

- LIS schools in Nigeria should provide adequate education and training aimed at producing graduates who are capable of being self-employed.
- All LIS schools in Nigeria should integrate entrepreneurship education courses into their curricula.
- Students in LIS schools in Nigeria should take entrepreneurship courses very seriously for self-sustenance on graduation.

Curricula for professional education are always influenced by the forces of dynamism that act on the society. Thus, courses are added to, expanded, or removed from a curriculum as events unfold in the society. The world in general is today preoccupied with the pursuit of sustainable development, and has mapped out seventeen goals to be achieved by 2030. Can the educational preparation of intending library and information professionals in Nigeria enhance their knowledge of the issues in sustainable development as it equips them with the skills to render general and specialized services on the subject?

3. Implications of Sustainable Development for LIS Curriculum

Library and information services required to support the quest for sustainable development are to be provided by graduates of Library and Information Science schools. The curriculum for their studies should be robust, including salient skills and knowledge for outstanding performance in the work place. The implication of this is that certain deliberate actions must be taken on the curriculum for LIS education in Nigeria. These are discussed in this section.

Review of the Standard Curriculum for LIS Education in Nigeria

In an attempt to unify the LIS education in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) developed the Benchmark and Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for Library and Information Science Departments in Nigerian Universities. Many scholars have observed the obsolescence of the curriculum prescribed in the long-extant 1999 edition of this document (Nwosu, 2009, Diso 2009, Aina 2014). Aina (2014) shows that the NUC curriculum has no provision for entrepreneurship, and knowledge management, and barely provides for ICT with just one course, "Automation in Libraries and Information Centres". Such a curriculum is thus inadequate for the education of library and information professionals for the 21st century. Although a revision was done in 2007, the resulting curriculum is not particularly appealing to the library schools because of its high education courses content. It becomes imperative therefore, that the NUC's official curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria be reviewed in line with the times.

Recognition of ICT and Entrepreneurship as New Stress Areas in LIS Schools Curricula

In the absence of an updated NUC standard curriculum, many library schools have had to introduce courses into their curricula according to their preferences. It is important that curricula review in LIS schools give adequate attention to ICT skills since the modern world is ICT-driven; no librarian lacking in ICT skills can hope to serve the information needs of modern society effectively. Therefore, this paper associates with Aina (2007) that an appropriate curriculum for LIS education in Nigeria must, in addition to offering basic library skills, expose students to courses such as basic computer skills, computer applications, (word processing, spreadsheet, database management systems), networking, Internet surfing and web design and publishing, public relations, editing, writing, advocacy, conservation and preservation, theories of archives and records management.

Skills acquired through these courses will be handy in work situations to serve the needs of the client effectively and efficiently. For instance, skill in Internet surfing acquired by a LIS student could be employed later in life to serve a user interested in any aspect of sustainable development goals. To illustrate, assuming the user's stated interest is SDG2 which focus is Agriculture, the librarian's Internet surfing skill will enable him access and collate a large amount of relevant information on the specific area of the user's need, with ease and speed. Moreover, users are increasingly becoming ICT-dependent not only for information but for virtually all spheres of life. The librarian must necessarily be imbued with ICT skills to be able to interact confidently with the users. It is therefore significant that ICT is stressed in the curricula of LIS schools in Nigeria.

The attention given to entrepreneurship in LIS schools in Nigeria is commendable. However, those LIS departments whose curricula lack this should cue in to be able to produce graduates who could take up self-paid information businesses. It is expected that the interest in sustainable development would open up opportunities for information businesses and thus, the LIS graduate should have been prepared to cash in on these opportunities.

The LIS graduate who becomes an information consultant could seek retainership with certain companies to furnish with valuable information on a desired aspect of sustainable development for a fee.

There is no doubt that good entrepreneurship skills acquired in school would facilitate performance as an entrepreneur. This justifies a stress on entrepreneurship on LIS schools' curricula.

Inclusion of Sustainable Development Knowledge in LIS Curriculum

Library and Information Science curriculum planners in Nigeria should factor sustainable development into the curriculum. This could be achieved through one of two ways: (1) Expansion of the content of some existing courses (2) Introduction of a new course. In option 1, the content of some of the courses already being offered could be expanded to accommodate material on sustainable development. For example, the course content of 'Libraries and Society' which is a compulsory first year course could be crafted to include material on sustainable development to help students appreciate the concept early in the programme. Historical development of the concept and the role of the United Nations could be part of the course. Other courses that could be adjusted to accommodate sustainable development are 'Resources and Services in Social Sciences' and 'Libraries and Information Services in Rural Communities'. The adjustment in 'Resources and Services in Social Sciences' could highlight certain resources and key services of organizations concerned with sustainable development. The course, 'Libraries and Information Services in Rural Communities' could further help students appreciate and identify sustainable and unsustainable development activities in the communities around them.

In option 2, a new course with suggested title 'Resources and Services for Sustainable Development' could be introduced into the LIS curriculum. The objective of such a course should be to help students appreciate the global interest in sustainable development and the role of library and information services in its achievement. It should be a 3-unit course to be offered at the 300 level of study.

4. Conclusion

Professional education programmes are always open to change in line with developments in the society. Over the years, the curriculum for Library and Information Science education in Nigeria has responded to developments in the society by introducing new courses, expanding existing ones or even removing some. Sustainable development is currently engaging global interest and seventeen SDGs have been mapped out. Graduates of LIS schools have a crucial role to play in the pursuit of this global project. Therefore the departments of Library and Information Science in Nigeria should develop and implement curricula appropriate to the new age, so that students would be helped to acquire knowledge and skills for effective services. Furthermore, there is need to adjust the LIS curriculum to accommodate issues in sustainable development to enable students understand the importance of the concept and perhaps help them develop a passion to contribute to its realization through relevant services.

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