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Justification for Reform in Library and Information Science Education in Nigerian Universities

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Introduction

Education helps define the life, values, political culture, and economic power of a nation. Knowledge, skills, norms, and values of responsible citizenship are inculcated through education. It is through education that the human resource capital of a nation is harnessed and deployed for development. As a nation, we often focus on projects like roads, housing, water, and power. According to Jumaid (2008) we must bear in mind that we need:

- An educated workforce to build those roads, bridges, and houses.
- Educated people to staff hospitals
- Educated people to run our information centres, communication networks, and factories.
- Educated policy-makers and administrators
- Educated leaders for tomorrow.

Without education, we have no society, no democracy, and no future. Nations like Singapore, China, and India readily admit that an improved education system was critical to their development process. They made education a priority focus, because they realized that without education could be no economic leap.

There is no doubt that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has found its niche in education. Developments in the education sector in developed and developing countries attest to the fact that ICT has become a central focus of many countries' educational policies and such, its use and integration has become widespread in the various school systems. The increasing trend of the use of ICT in classroom work across the globe has been necessitated by three major factors:

- Electronic technological devices are being used to prepare the present generation of young people for a future workplace that will undoubtedly be characterized by information technology (IT). Preparing students and the wider citizenry for tomorrow's world can only be done through a careful use of ICT tools, computers, Internet spreadsheets and databases.
- ICT tools makes schools more efficient in the teaching-learning enterprise. Classroom teachers' personal professional development and academic productivity have been greatly enhanced.

1

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- ICT tools are being used to improve, reform or renovate teaching and learning. Learners are stimulated to learn actively either on an independent basis or working closely with others. (Olorundare, 2007).

With the advent of ICT, library and information providers, especially in the developed countries, have been able to serve patrons not only face to face but also virtually. Library and Information science curricula have been under constant review in order to meet the requirements of ICT in the electronic age. The case is different in Nigeria. Library systems here are largely dominated by conservative and unproductive practices. However, with the wind of reform now blowing across the various sectors and sub-sectors of the economy, library and information science should not be left out.

The Concept of Reform

Reform as it applies to education connotes the efforts made by stakeholders, especially the government, towards making the educational process more effective, functional, and productive. Achunine (2006) sees the educational reforms, as a comprehensive reworking or rebuilding of the educational system for the ultimate purpose of improving teaching and learning. Reform is in some cases required to as restructuring. Restructuring refers to changing the system of rules, relationship and roles that govern the way, time, people, knowledge, skills, space and technology are used.

The goal of restructuring is to preserve and build upon what has been successful in the process of educating our children and more so to re-think and redesign those aspects of the enterprise that have either failed or become obsolete. To Adepoju and Olaniji (1997) educational reform and innovation are "synonymous with the injection of new ideas, methods and techniques or strategies into educational system so as to improve both internal and external efficiency and arrangements of the system and more of development social cultural, political, economic or technological." Educational reform also implies bringing about a change in an already existing order or status quo. Reforms are the introduction of a new dispensation to meet the challenges posed by new technological development and to improve the quality of the system.

Reform come up as a way of ensuring that the educational system is structured and made to be more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the society through the injection of new ideas, new research findings and new approaches into the system. A reform is a long process or programme that begins with problem identification study and analysis and ends with the evaluation and continuation or termination of the evaluation and continuation or termination of the programme. (Miriogu, 2008). It involves among other things, the development of policy alternatives, experimentation, implementation and feedback.

Rationale for Reforms in Education in General

Naturally, change is inevitable phenomenon since it must occur once the time is ripe, whether it is intended or not. Generally people do not feel comfortable with unplanned or accidental changes, because such changes have unpredictable outcome, most of which could be negative, destructive, or undesired. Planned changes are rather more preferable. The reasons are not farfetched.

First, we live in a dynamic world, where events constantly bring change. Any change brings challenges, which require new knowledge, strategy, skills, or competencies. To address such changes, educational policies, programmes, and methods of delivery must undergo transformation. Examples of such changing world conditions include changing information and communication technologies that have created skill obsolesce and bring in new techniques and knowledge explosion (Agabi, 2003). Other are changes in societal values, rejection of traditional sex roles, and questioning of moral and religious orders. The pressures arising from these change demand new values, technologies, and skills (Bishop, 1986).

The second reason why change in education is indispensable is the need to improve educational delivery process through new knowledge. Educational research is discovering new knowledge, skills, and methods that can help improve teaching and learning (Miriogu, 2008).

Third, there is need to identify better and improved delivery processes, reconsidering current methods for assessing learner achievement and accrediting work experience.

Bishop (1986) points out that reforms or innovations in education recognize certain factors, including:

- The educational system must be seen as an integrated whole in which whenever one of its part is modified, the whole system will feel the effects and therefore be affected also.
- Any educational reform effort must consider the elements of the change agent that initiates the educational changes; the innovation or change itself as regards its purpose and direction and the user, that is, the person or group to whom the reforms is directed or targeted. These factors interact with change and are changed by each other during the process of reform/ innovation.
- Time: Reform/innovation is a social process and so takes place over a period of time. Educational reform must therefore be a time-phased process requiring piece meal implementation of the desired change.
- Afianmagbon (2007) articulated the stage that must be followed for a successful reform programme. These are:
    - Establishing goals to be achieved
    - arranging the goals in their order of priority
    - strategically deciding the best alternative for achieving the goals
    - anticipating policy conflicts
    - developing agreement procedures
    - preparing for implementation.

Justification for Library and Information Science Reform

Library and information science is a discipline concerned with study of the principles and skills required for systematic collection, organization and use of society's information resources in libraries. It is also concerned with the forces governing the flow of information resources and creating ready access to these resources. The aim of the programme is to provide a basic professional course, which will prepare librarians for all types of libraries and related documentation and information centres. The study of another discipline is dictated by the nature of the library profession, which requires both professional skills and a broader academic background for effective practice. (LIS Degree Programme, 2007). It is in the realization of the significant role played by information in the development of a nation, that library and information schools were set up. They are expected to train and produce the needed manpower for the nation's information work. At present, there is a great demand for the services of information workers (librarians, archivists, documentalists, corporate information analysts) in the Nigerian labour market (Udoh, 2000).

Most importantly, 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 century. ICT is seen as the electricity of the information age and its access to library and information science education as a key to the process of development. The rapid advances being made in ICT, particularly in the Internet, have very important implications for education, educators and learners. (Anyaegbunam and Anyaegbinam, 2007).

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. (Udoh, 2000). The

new breed information worker needs to be well informed about the tools for practicing his or her profession. This is because the library or information centre has a special role of ensuring that information resources are adequately assembled, efficiently organized and effectively used. This is so because provision of information in a manner most useful to its clients is the ultimate test of all the efforts and funds expended and sustained in maintaining a library or information centre.

Today there is explosion of information which merely reached its peak in the last century but has had its origins centuries earlier. Information explosion in not restricted to the field of technical and scholarly publishing alone. Government departments and agencies also generate and process a vast amount of official documentation. What is required is to assemble, process and organize this mass of information systematically and disseminate them effectively as adequately and currently as possible. This has been made achievable through developments in ICTs. 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. Library and information services have developed beyond mere acquisition of books and their provision for use. For instance, reference service, which is an aspect of library services now involves online provision of specific and required information. Consequently at present, the name "reference service" has been overtaken by the name "Information service" in many libraries in tertiary institutions in Europe and America (Nwachukwu and Mole, 2008).

The onus of accomplishing this task lies with our library schools. Furthermore, the teachers handling the training of the students in the Nigerian library schools need to be re-trained in the modern theory and practice of information and communication technologies if they are to meet with the demands of the society and the Nigerian labour market in the next millennium. There is no doubt that in the 21st century, Nigeria will be moving towards an information society. This is a period when people will not take the supply of information for granted for success in their daily activities. The labour market both locally and internationally is likely to become more complex. Therefore, only those expertise can get gainful employment. Library and information science Curriculum should be under constant review in order to meet the requirements of the electronic age. Thus, Vesi (2003) points out that as technology has changed and allowed ever new ways of creating, storing, organizing, and providing information, the public expectation of the role of librarians has increased. The end product of this challenge is the provision of adequate and up-to-date information and research services from information resources to the library patrons. Since the means to this end is faulty, and unsatisfactory, there is urgent need for change. There is an urgent need for a sustainable reform and refocusing.

Considering the role of library and information science education and library services of universities in training manpower and providing library and information services as well as research and scholarship services and their critical role in the overall national development, they are expected to ensure the availability of well trained manpower, who are capable of providing access to adequate and up-to-date, library and information services for research. Consequently, library and information science education reform in Nigerian universities now is not only indispensable but also timely.

Reform in Library and Information Science Education: What Should Government Do?

It is expected that the Nigerian government should play vital role in facilitating library and information science education reform in the following ways:

- Initiating and implementing a policy guideline for a sustainable library and information science education reform in universities in Nigeria.
- Ensuring through the National Universities Commission (NUC) the inclusion of ICTs education in the academic programmes of the library schools.
- Promoting through the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE) and Nigerian Library Association (NLA) strong linkage programme as well as staff

exchange programme among library and information science schools in Nigeria and with their counterparts in other countries.

- Establishing in the supervisory agency NUC, a unit which will serve as supervisory and coordinating organ for library and information science education developments in the universities in the country.

Conclusion

An objective and result motivated reform is what is required in library and information science education in Nigerian universities now. Just as reform /innovation is taking place in education programmes generally, library and information science education should not be an exception. The survival of the library profession depends on the ability and willingness of innovation/reform to take place. Library and information officers and other stakeholders in the information services provision, must play prominent role in the reform. This will change the status quo and inject fresh blood in the training of library and information providers who will be equal to the challenges of the 21st century library and information service provision. It will additionally result in training of manpower for greater and better service delivery which will contribute to the academic development of the clientele and overall development of the nation.

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5

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