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Role of Journals in Developing Emerging Scholars in Library and Information Science

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Abstract

This paper discussed the role journals play in the development of emerging LIS scholars. It describes the characteristics of emerging LIS scholars and concludes that editors are not doing enough to encourage emerging scholars in LIS. The paper recommends that there is a need for LIS Professional associations to provide an enabling environment for emerging LIS scholars in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Academic journals' role in the dissemination of technical and scientific information got to the crescendo after the World War II, with the advancement of information explosion. The need for research and the role it plays in the creation and development of knowledge led to the exponential increase in journal publication witnessed during this epoch. Journals quickly became acceptable avenues that created opportunities that expanded, formalized and systematized the sharing and dissemination of technical and scientific information among scholars. Journals established modalities, which defined requirements for editing such papers, choosing methodology and final documentation and publication of technical papers. These modalities assured that papers to be published passed through objective scrutiny through which personal sentiments and conceptual pitfalls are removed. Through the ages, research methods created through journals, verified and expanded scientific paradigm used for information generation and sharing. Due to the roles journals play, Serema and Mooko (2002) submitted that journals are "primary sources of

information on research undertaken in any given field. They provide information through the publication of the original papers, reports of completed and on-going research.” Consequently, Black and Leysen cited by Ochai and Nedosa (1998) put forward that research outcomes published in journals often “sharpen skills and broadens perspectives for the daily services provided.”

Irrespective of the importance of scholarly publications to the development of library and information science (LIS) profession, it has been observed that emerging scholars, especially those who are not faculty members, rarely submit papers that get published (Stilwell, 2000.) This is despite the fact that 1993 Academic Staff Union of Universities/ Federal Government of Nigeria (ASUU/FGN) agreement which gave practising librarians the right to enjoy the same privileges with teaching staff and mandated publication in journals as a yard stick for promotion. Various problems have been ascribed to this phenomenon; some of them are personal to emerging LIS scholars, while others are associated with their training while in school and how editors handle papers emanating from them. The expectation that journals editors will help train emerging LIS scholars has not been realized. Therefore, most emerging LIS scholars are frustrated and have found publishing in journals beyond their reach. The problems have challenged the sustenance of LIS journals and the growth of LIS research in Africa.

This paper, therefore, hopes to awaken the knowledge about the lack of concern currently experienced in LIS regarding the development of emerging scholars and the possible roles LIS journals can play. It hopes to define and describe who qualifies to be called emerging scholar in LIS and how LIS journals, through their editors, can build on the knowledge they acquired in schools for research and consequently help them acquire required competencies for conducting valid and reliable research and presenting its outcome for publication. This paper hopes to point out to LIS journal editors that they can go the extra mile of helping emerging LIS scholars acquire skills and also grow in confidence that will help them produce valid and qualitative paper that could get published.

2. The Emerging LIS Scholar: A Description

In the past, LIS authors have used different terms like emerging scholars, new scholars or potential authors, (Ochai and Nedosa, 1998; Aina and Mabawonku, 1996), to designate new scholars in the profession. These terms are used for those who are likely to become researchers and technical paper authors. However, according to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English (2001) to emerge is “to come out,” while a scholar is “a person who knows a lot about a particular subject.” Literarily then, an emerging scholar is a person coming out to know a lot

about a particular subject. From this literary definition we would begin to agree that emerging LIS scholars are those coming out to know a lot about LIS

This description also points to the fact that an emerging scholar willingly comes out to learn in order to know a lot about his subject of interest. With this, we can begin to streamline that emerging LIS scholars that are addressed in this paper are those with genuine interest in research. Those who willingly take up interest in LIS research. Ochai and Nedosa (1998) put forward that the willingness to do research is as a result of:

eagerness or enthusiasm to publish...[and/or availability of] conducive environment...[and] the perception of the individual LIS professional as to what he thinks of his roles are equally important.

The training of LIS scholars is very paramount in stimulating the eagerness that makes them do research and what they think of their roles as information professionals. The educational system they pass through and the inculcation of research skills into them are variables that also interplay in emerging scholars' ability to produce scholarly papers. Zakari (2000) put forward that

Education and training of library and information professionals in Nigeria, as it has been in other societies is aimed at preparing the beneficiaries to be creative, innovative and acquire all the necessary skills, experiences, capabilities and capacities including a working framework that would make them meet up to expectations of the employers, the profession and practice.

Educational training of LIS students and subsequent training they receive during the early days of their professional practice, stimulate the enthusiasm that spurs them to produce scholarly papers. Ochai and Nedosa (1998) commented on the problem that results from LIS professionals' educational status and experience thus:

the genesis of ... low publication output maybe found in his educational preparation. Quite often people have entered LIS with hardly any academic background beyond undergraduate diploma, while other became librarians after the acquisition of a first degree. In either case, majority do not advance beyond the acquisition of master's degree. It must be pointed out that the master's degree is not necessarily a research degree.

The ideal emerging LIS scholars break through these odds to achieve appropriate, tangible and deplorable skills that would aid his preparation for research, carrying out such research and reporting it. To present a competitive manuscript, emerging LIS scholars must have a grasp of adequate writing skill and ability to logically identify a research problem and also carryout logical evaluation of such identified

problem. Aina (1997) also identified that the main bane of scholarly paper production in Africa is lack of adequate research and writing skills. Fisher and Oulton (1999) indicated that the "final stage of interpreting and reporting is to present the findings in a useable form, with an evaluative commentary on their validity and reliability." These skills help in the production of qualitative papers, the sustainability of LIS journals and the promotion of LIS research.

Consequently, Aina and Mabawonku (1996) submitted that one of the factors that encourage the success of scholarly journals is "to a large extent on the availability of high quality manuscript." Therefore, emerging LIS scholars are those who have at the back of their mind pressing need for writing skills and production of quality manuscripts in order to eradicate problems associated with sustenance of LIS journals and promoting research in Africa.

Apart from the need to possess adequate writing skill, Olorunnisola (2003) proposed that logical presentation is also very important in research. He asserted that research "is a process that employs logic at different stages...." For this reason, emerging LIS scholars are those who through adequate and relevant training show traits that they would be able to logically move through these research stages:

- problem identification,
- planning and organization for solution,
- conducting the study-manipulating and controlling variables, etc., and
- writing the research report (Olorunnisola, 2003).

Battin cited by Ochai and Nedosa (1998) declared that the LIS profession needs "people who have been trained to question assumptions who are [logical enough and] able to collect data and make informed judgment." The need for coercion and logicity cannot be over emphasized in the process of research. It spells out the systematic process that must be followed. It has to do with relating different data gathered in a meaningful manner and interpreting them logically and controlling the variables that may lead to questioning the validity and reliability of the research result.

Again, citing Black and Leysen, Ochai and Nedosa (1998) revealed three major claims librarians make that affect their research productivity:

- there is a conflict between service to users and research expectations. If librarians are required to perform research, the quality of library service could diminish.
- most academic librarians work under twelve months contracts, do not receive salaries equal to those of teaching faculty with the same rank, do not enjoy a flexible work day and week and are not provided with compensatory release time necessary for them to make scholarly contributions to their field.

- Librarians working within the academic model will often ask, how am I going to accomplish all my reference work, carry out my committee assignments as expected, participate in the profession, and perform research when I am required to work everyday, twelve months a year?

Emerging LIS scholars are ideally those scholars who have understood these challenges and are ready to rationalize them. They are willing to put up a strong character that aids turning their enthusiasm to eventual production of scientific papers despite these problems.

The true emerging LIS scholar carries out research because he has been able to find out what he needs as a professional and what others, especially those practising need. The ideal emerging LIS scholar is able to do this because he possesses the ability to gather information, organize it, and use it to investigate circumstances around him in order to produce new information or add value to existing ones. He/she focuses on solving problems associated with the profession.

3. Impact of Journals on LIS and Emerging LIS Scholars

The LIS profession is made up of various categories of professionals that are defined through the institutions they work for. In universities, LIS professionals are accorded with academic status; hence, research becomes very pertinent. In other educational set ups, LIS professionals are seen and are required to work as information managers and/or knowledge “gate keepers” who integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) to conventional styles of managing information.

LIS professionals also play complex and challenging roles in the vibrant and changing modern business environment. In large for-profit corporations, LIS professionals coordinate information resource management (IRM) in ways that information and knowledge are produced as a part of the corporation’s economic resources. This is also applicable in public corporations that currently struggle to keep up with civil service reforms that require higher productivity from the civil service. In effect, LIS professionals have practical roles to play in all organizations that employ them to support management and staff with required information necessary for meeting organizational objectives.

The need for scholarly communication in LIS makes the requirements that LIS professionals should carry out research and publish them very pertinent. Shoola (2000) have defined scholarly publication as an activity that involves the communication of knowledge generated through research, opinion and/or evaluations of past knowledge or emerging ones. Aina (2004) submitted that “For any discipline to grow research must constantly be carried out, as this will extend the frontiers of

the discipline.” Therefore, Alemna (1998) advised that whether LIS professionals are in “academic, special, public or school libraries, research and publication should be taken seriously.” This is because through research, new tactical and strategic innovations for managing information are generated and are applied to aid efficient and effective information service delivery to management.

LIS scholarly publications have, therefore, become mechanisms for developing the profession. They have provided avenues formally constituted to receive, edit and present new findings and/or expansions and evolution of these findings to the LIS community. Alemna (1998) revealed that LIS professionals actually have interest in research, and do publish in LIS journals. Several journals, proceedings and seminar papers and position papers abound in LIS that had served as, and still serve as media for communicating scholarly. The pertinent question to ask is, how may of those LIS professionals publishing fall into the category we have referred to as emerging LIS scholars?

The act and science of publishing depends heavily on the ability to observe and to carryout literature (records) review. For emerging LIS scholars to participate in publishing records of LIS civilization, they must possess the competencies and must have required resources readily available to them. For them to be incorporated into the web of LIS scholarly communication, they must first have access to publications that will help them learn the language appropriate for communication within this web and how to appropriately use the set language. These requirements are civilizations that can be gradually inculcated into them by journal editors if journal editors could show extra interest in this complex task. This would have reduced the problems militating against sustaining LIS journals and promoting LIS research in Africa.

Role of LIS Editors in Training Scholars

LIS journals would have supported the growth of emerging LIS scholars by serving as media through which their papers are presented for evaluation. The evaluation would involve frequent and timely communication to point out questionable areas. This will also give room to clearly communicate reasons why papers are rejected so that necessary review and knowledge of how future papers should be written must have already been gained. Through this mechanism and with time, those papers that pass through the scrutiny of editors and editorial boards, criticisms and contributions from other scholars become verified information.

Since the editor together with his editorial board members interpret research based on their experience, emerging LIS scholars gain insight into modalities used for interpreting research. This would enable them get acquainted with every issue concerned with publishing papers. Editor’s interpretations of paradigm and methodology choices allow emerging LIS scholars to gain knowledge of best

practices in research. At this point editors help interpret research and also create, so to say, trends to be followed. These trends, if taught to emerging LIS scholars, allows them to understand intricacies about papers; why they are accepted or rejected.

Editors and editorial board members could create fora for debates and discussions relating to research and papers submitted for publication that may be beneficial to emerging LIS scholars. The fora would develop the field of study, help sustain LIS journals and also promote LIS research, especially as it relates to new areas of interest. Through communication with these new authors, their positions are questioned and reviewed to suit standards. Also, all forms of conceptual and content errors and controversial assertions are pointed out and discussed. Communication and feedback received are cardinal points through which academic journals help develop the emerging LIS scholar who presents his/her papers for publication.

Competent expertise would also be required to have emerging LIS scholars trained on areas that are important to the presentation of papers for publication. Text formatting competencies reduce editorial stress and cost incurred by editors and sometimes serves as a vital factor used for considering papers for publication. Reliable expertise would recognize potentials of authors, among emerging LIS scholars, even after his paper must have being rejected. Communication of potentials, ways to improve methodologies and presentations can only be done by journal editors who are committed and whose expertise is at the optimum. Aina and Mabawonku (1996) pointed this out when they indicated that:

In some cases where it was felt that the literature review was not up to date we have had to search LISA and Library Literature on CD-ROM to identify relevant papers which would then be reviewed and incorporated into their manuscript. At times papers related to a particular topic were sent to authors, to review and incorporate in their papers. This service has especially been provided to accommodate authors who are relatively junior in the profession or those authors in countries where physical access to relevant papers is limited.

The problem of availability of technology for the management of academic journals cannot be overemphasized. Aina and Mabawonku (1996) revealed that computers allow "correspondence regularly with authors and referees." Despite the fact that technological evolution has brought about new innovations that aid typesetting, editing and design, the availability of latest technology that fully support these benefits is still lacking. In most African countries there is still no national information technology policy-this could be a part of the national information policy (NIP). The need for this is to map out what a country needs in terms of information and

communication technologies (ICTs). These needs are segmented in a comprehensive NIP according to the needs of various cadre of people it is meant to serve. Provision of ICTs in institutions is made mandatory, especially in universities, research institutes and other institutions where emerging LIS scholars can be found. Through this, access to required ICTs by emerging LIS scholars, sustainability of LIS journals and promotion of LIS research through technical paper production would be guaranteed.

Another pressing problem academic journals face in Africa is the absence of government support to research and development and the sustainability of academic journals. Through progressive policy, governments can encourage the growth of research and thereby sustain academic journals. This can be directly done through monetary incentives or incentives based on provision of facilities to academics. Such incentives would be very invaluable to emerging LIS scholars whose economic strength cannot be compared to those of established authors. Governments, through their various policies can encourage NGOs to support journal production and its sustenance. This can be done through tax cuts, removal of trade tariffs on importations of materials that support journal production, and through international agreement with other governments and/or international associations for human, technology, and knowledge exchange. Funding of conferences, seminars and workshops where emerging LIS scholars can benefit immensely cannot be valued in terms of its benefits to emerging LIS scholars. To cut this short, there are so many areas which the government through its various policies can improve journals.

Another problem academic journals face in Africa is the interest of academics in publishing their papers in local journals. Alemna (1998) citing Aina and Mabawonku disclosed how status of LIS professionals determined where they publish their scholarly works. In his words he noted that "professors, lecturers, senior management librarians are likely to report their research findings in serious journals whether local or foreign." This results from several factors ranging from need for international recognition, interest in securing international jobs and call for papers which comes with several monetary and other incentives and the over flogged requirements for promotion through publication in foreign journals. Most African countries require their scholars to publish in foreign journals before their papers can be adjudged as international publication. This has led to the production of locally important papers which could benefit emerging LIS scholars in foreign journals that are not accessible to them. This increases the current technical information famine in African whose victims are more among LIS scholars. This affects research promotion and in turn affects LIS journal sustainability.

Lastly, lack of encouragement of emerging LIS scholars has also contributed to the bane of journals in Africa. Most scholars have pointed out that lack of papers

in specialized areas makes it impossible for scholars to float journals for the dissemination of information in such specialized areas. If more emerging LIS scholars are trained and are helped to acquire basic skills for researching, this problem would have been rationalized. The increase in the number of papers coming in from emerging LIS scholars would provide alternative for editors to select more relevant and reliable papers.

4. Conclusion

The society that requires growing and keeping its civilization must be willing to teach such civilization to its upcoming generation. The arguments raised in this paper are pointed towards transferring LIS research initiative and culture to upcoming generation of LIS professional. The fact that the desired societal and personal development long for by LIS professionals cannot be achievable without adequate and grounded research culture, made this paper very important. It has been pointed out that the growth of emerging LIS scholars translates to the growth of the LIS profession and the society. Therefore, the author wishes to conclude on the verge that past initiatives by the LIS profession should be complemented by new initiative backed with firm commitment to the course of salvaging the death of research in LIS due to emerging LIS scholars' inability to carry out research. This should be chased at all level of LIS existence, that is, in practical library and information service environment and in academic environment.

5. Recommendations

The following are implementable recommendations:

- LIS professional association should help create an enabling environment for investment, especially by LIS journals on the development needs of emerging LIS scholars.
- LIS should ensure that existing policies relating to information are promoted at all levels of government to support the importation of technology, human resources and knowledge that may be helpful in promoting research skills among emerging scholars.
- design and sponsor training and retraining of emerging scholars on techniques required to carry out research and to get them published. This should also include encouraging non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to sponsor such training programmes with adequate incentives from both the government and the LIS profession.

- provision of curriculum that will include subjects that are meant to instill basic skills in research (and also supporting such curriculum with required human and technological infrastructure) and also allow them acquire required information literacy skills that will enable them interact with the information environment available to them should be made.

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