# LIBRARIES AND THE SOCIETY

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## AT THE LIBRARY WEEK - ETINAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA ON

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**Introduction:**

Librarianship evolved as a profession that is concerned with the systematic organization of knowledge in all its various formats and its dissemination for the purpose of preserving the society's cultural heritage, promoting scholarship and the generation of new knowledge (IFLA 1976).

With advances in technology and the formulation of Ranganathan's five normative principles of librarianship published in 1931, special stress was laid on USE rather than preservation of materials for its sake. These fundamental principles are stated as:-
1)    Books are for use
2)    Every reader his book
3)    Every book it's reader
4)    Save the time of the reader
5)    Library is a growing organism

The Ranganathan laws highlighted the quantity and complexity of library and information services which generated an attitudinal change. Quality of service became measured by speed and accuracy of fulfillment of user's demands not by the volume of books and documents. This change of attitude embodied the explicit recognition of the primacy of the user rather than the source, bringing the librarian face to face with information service

The field of information science emerged thereafter

*"to investigate the proportion and behaviour of information (processes data) on the forces that govern the transfer process and the technology required to process accumulated knowledge for optimum accessibility and use.*

Zurkowski (1984) attempted to delineate the boundaries of the library and information industry. He depicts the information industry in terms of segments three of such which include:

1)    Content Services        -            News agencies; libraries, databases,

|   |   |   | information brokers. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2) | Content Packages | - | Books; newspapers, films; records; tapes; videodiscs |
| 3) | Facilitation Services | - | Data processing; timesharing; turnkey services |

Library and Information services obviously cuts across many business and academic disciplines in the society.

## The Human Service in the LIS Profession

Human service is dedicated to providing services to individuals, families and communities in need of assistance. The goal being to enhance the quality of life for those served. Some of the roles include counselor to those who need support; broker to help people use community resources; teacher of daily living skills, advocate for those unable to advocate for ther selves, mediator between clients and agencies; care giver to people, elders, and disabled adults.

I invite you to see the human service in the LIS profession as follows:-

## LIS Professional – The Advocate

The LIS Professional is a ready advocate for building information literate communities. This is because a thriving culture economy and democracy will best be advanced by people able to recognize their need for information; identity, locate, access, evaluate and apply the needed information. Various advocacy messages abound for different audiences. For example, sensitization adverts could carry various advocacy messages targeted at such audiences as, Community leaders, Decision makers, Education and Community Employees, Parents, Children, Teachers and adult learners.

Sample advocacy messages are:
i) **Advocacy Message**

Community leaders/Decision makers must recognize the importance of information literacy and invest in schools, colleges and libraries as centres of information, culture and lifelong learning.

ii) **Advocacy Message**

Information literacy is critical to success in today'job market and critical in today's information exploitation.

## LIS Professional the Broker

The broker helps people use community resources. The dilemma of facing overwhelming information exploitation and being not adequately informed characterizes today's global village via the web. Services of professional information brokers are in demand in aid of information searching and delivery, efficient use of IT, analysis and structuring of needed information for diverse subjects and interests. Students, teachers, policy makers, business executives are in need of this service in the society. Library and Information specialists in this area are ever ready to provide this very specialized assistance.

## LIS Professional the Mediator

Students in higher education are becoming more multicultural, their needs and demands vary their personal backgrounds and values diversifying. Today multiculturalism includes such factors as race, nationality, religion, gender, age, sexual enablement and socio-economic status. These different groups interact with people and process information in different ways, leading to a need for flexibility without which even basic communication can become difficult. These changes offer new opportunities and challenges for librarians in the in the education process. To interact with the increasing divers groups of library users, librarian need to communicate and teach in a manner that is relevant to the individuals, and can rel .. to their own experiences. Librarians mediate by deemphasizing the inf .......tion itself but putting more stress on the strategy of search which may be different for each person during the process of information search.

## LIS Professional the Teacher/Counsellor

The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (IFLA, 2000) provides a clear mandate for the instructional role of the school/college librarian. Information is viewed as fundamental to knowledge acquisition; that professional intervention is required to equip students with lifelong learning skills and that librarians need to work together with teacher. or students to achieve skills of literacy, reading, and problem solving. Kuhlthau (1991, 1993, 1994, 1999) provides one of the fundamental building blocks for the collaborative instructional role of teachers and librarians.

According to Kahithau, an inquiry approach "takes students out of the usual predigested format of the textbook and rote memorization into the

process of learning from a variety of sources to construct their own understandings." The Information Search Process (ISP) has been found to occur in seven stages: Initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, presentation and assessment, which are critical to the construction of personal knowledge. The outcome is that most students fail to build a background knowledge that promotes focused search and fail to establish a clear focus that guides the collection of relevant information. This complex interplay of thoughts establishes uncertainty, a cognitive state that commonly causes affective symptoms of anxiety and lack of confidence. The scenario suggests a pedagogy that has knowledge construction and inquiry learning. In this context, the role of school librarians as teachers goes beyond developing a range of information literacy competencies; they initiate, document and implement learning improvements in educational institutions.

## LIS Professional – The Caregiver

One of the basic functions of the public library and information centre is to encourage wholesome recreation and constructive use of leisure time. While this function is easily performed in the developed countries, in the developing countries, the vast majority are preoccupied with daily subsistence living and illiteracy. The library, as a recreation institution is a far-cry. The public librarian could serve as custodian of a repository for entertainment reading, viewing and listening materials, video, audio cassettes, films, slides could be borrowed for home use. In this role libraries operate as vicarious complementary systems with therapeutic possibilities.

From the above analysis, you will agree with me that the LIS profession is essentially Human Service.

## Community Development: The Panacca for Progress

Community development is the process by which efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities and to integrate these communities in the life of the nation and enable them contribute fully to national progress.

This process begins when a community member establishes relationships that lead to a systematic discussion of problems and issues. Usually one or two individuals assume leadership roles in the facilitation of discussions that identify the problems to confront and reason/brainstorm about solutions. These interactions are designed to raise consciousness levels to a point where community members view themselves as partners in

community development. In the case of the celebrant of today, it could be the development of the reading culture and the evolution of an information society.

The burden of community development should not therefore be in the hands of only a few. Interaction with some members of this community reveals that indigenes have been exposed to education in different disciplines and vocations. I purse to ask, what has been your input in community service by reason of your education and working experience. I have reason to also perceive that this community has men and women who have been educated in the United States of America, United Kingdom etc. I ask; to what extent have you brought the experience acquired by that international exposure to bear on the lives of the underprivileged in your community. Development is not only the burden of the highly educated. The qualification for human service and community to today conceptualize a vision to maximize their education for the community. I suggest a blueprint for the development of any community into an information society.

## Standard Indicators of Effective Readership

Having attempted an understanding of effective readership, it may be pertinent to identify, some indicators of effective readership. We face an information-rich future. Ability to adapt and fulfill individual potentials will require acquisition of skills for life-long learning and independent decision-making. Information harnessed from reading is a vital component in the development of critical thought and independent decision-making. It was in this regard that the Information Literacy Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 1997) developed standards for effective readers.

They put forward standard indications for effective readership. That is, readers must:
- Master the skills needed to access information in print, non-print and electronic sources.
- Understand and master effective search process and reporting skills.
- Develop the ability to evaluate, extract synthesize and utilize information from a variety of sources and media.
- Explore the creative use of information.
- Enhance their own self-knowledge through developing a love of reading.
- Explore the values and beliefs of others by reading world literature.
- Think critically and make decisions based on personal needs and values.

- Develop an understanding of the country's cultural heritage and history as well as cultures and histories of other societies.
- Utilize data and information to expand their own knowledge base.
- Actively participate in decisions about the society.
- Against the backdrop of these standard indicators, let us analyse surveys of some readership clusters in Nigeria.

## A.    Children as Readers: A Survey

I conducted a survey of 50 students in 2007 in a government public secondary school while on teaching practice supervision of Faculty of Education Students in Akwa Ibom State. My study sample was randomly selected from Junior Secondary School students of average reading ability. Interviews were carried out in an informal and friendly manner so that although based on a number of set questions, they took the form of informal discussions. The interviews were based on 15 questions:-

Do you like reading or not? Why?
Do you think you are a good reader?
Do you prefer to read quietly or to read aloud?
Do you read a lot at home?
What kind of books do you like best?
Where do you get the books from?
Do your parents read much at home?
What sort of things do they like to read?
What made you choose the current book you are readir . if you if any?
Is it a difficult book to read?
If yes how and why is it difficult?
Show me one difficult word?
When you read, what do you do when you meet a difficult word?
Do you think students should be taught how to read?
Why do you grown-ups should read?

The analysed results showed that of the 50 students interviewed, over two-thirds (75%) replied that they liked reading; although it is possible that some students may have given the reply they thought would be approved of. There were indicators that certain students still regarded reading as mystery of techniques while other s had rich story of taking pleasure in the information to be gained fror ooks. 25(50%) students considered themselves good readers, 18 (3 .uj were doubtful

while 7(14%) were sure they were not good reading. 36(72%) students said they preferred reading quietly to themselves rather than read aloud to someone else. 45 Students (90%), said that books they read at home were mostly recommended text books. About one half of the students gave the impression that one not much reading was done by their parents. In speaking of difficulties encountered in reading books, the majority of children indicated that most of them still regarded reading as a skill to be mastered at the decoding level. When asked why they thought students should learn to read, only 5(10%) students mentioned enjoyment and relaxation as an aim.

**B. Newspaper/Newsmagazine Readership in Nigeria: A study**

In 2006, the Readership Promotion on Campus Initiative was launched in the University of Uyo because of stories but unproven belief that there was a slow but steady decline in readership. This was carried out in research collaboration with the Newspaper Readers Association/Library and Information Science Student Association (LISA). Results of this survey produced insights into newspaper readership in Nigeria.

Ten newspaper across Nigeria were survey for customers' reaction to them-their news content and general organization of the services provided. For the customer inquiry, more than 1,000 respondents completed a detailed survey about media habits generally. The results showed that 50% of Nigerians are non readers, 30% are moderate readers and 20% are readers. The result of this survey highlighted some imperatives to grow readership in Nigeria.

**C. Readership Access of Electronic Resources: A study**

Physical access to the internet for both young and adult readers' involve availability of the computer at school, work or home; adequate time online to explore, adequate skills and knowledge of search engines. Udofia (2006) conducted a study on Graduate students Utilization of and Satisfaction with Internet Provision on South South Nigeria. The study sought to:

. Determine graduate students use and satisfaction with available information on the internet.

. Determine graduate students' satisfaction with the comprehensiveness of the information on the internet and accessibility to information on the internet.

. Determine graduate students satisfaction with staff competence and responsiveness in internet browsing centers.

. Determine graduate students affordability of the cost of internet access

Result from the study showed that only about 12% of graduate students' access internet, information exists in abundance on the internet. Information from the internet was not considered comprehensive as the information generated daily in Nigerian institutions, ministries, and other agencies are absent from the global bank. Staff of the browsing centers was neither competent nor responsive to assist users. Graduate students found accessing information on the internet difficult probably due to inadequate information literacy skills and knowledge of appropriate search engines. The cost of information search on the internet was considered expensive.

**Factors Militating Against Effective Readership in Nigeria**

1. **Socioeconomic indicators in Nigeria**

Recently, a Senior Special Assistant to the President MDGs recently lamented the degree to which Nigeria's public service are starved of essential investment and poorly managed over decades. Accountability for the quality of services and managerial arrangements for essential maintenance are adjudged absent. The perverse nature and inertia of this systemic collapse has posed major challenges to essential services that should promote effective readership National emphasis therefore has focused on the eight (8) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targeting poverty, Universal Basic Education, gender mainstreaming, child mortality, maternal healthcare, disease prevalence and improves international credibility. Evolving a reading culture is not on the top agenda of government.

2. **Inadequate Reading Resources**

Reported studies highlighted the fact that even in the mist of abundance of information in the internet, inadequacies still exist concerning relevant resources with local content and credibility of authorship.

3. **Inadequate Reading Instruction in Schools/Colleges**

The reported survey have indicated a gap in library and information skills acquisition of students and adults. A library; technology and

information literacy module built into the school curriculum from primary school to tertiary institutions is inadvertently lacking.

4. **Poor Services by LIS Professionals**

Rapid emerging technologies have prompted a comprehensive review of LIS services. Most librarians are yet to upgrade themselves from the traditional roles of preserving, cataloguing, classification and readers services to structuring of web sites (architecture); information analysis and management of broad based information environments and problems.

5. **Poor Funding of Libraries**

There has been worldwide lamentation on the issue of funding of libraries. University libraries are under-funded and pu 'ic libraries are neglected. Lack of libraries and information centres, equipments, ICT facilities, constant electricity are presently insurmount le challenges.

## Readership Development And Information Literacy Advocacy (REDILA) Project
### What Is The REDILA Project?

The REDILA project is a fund centered and strategic approach to creating a reading culture and life long information literacy. It is a reader development and ICT literacy programme aimed at promoting the culture of reading among children and youths. The programme builds partnerships between parents, educators, librarians, administrators and the rural community. Efforts at omoting good reading habits are effected through the involvement of all segments of the society at every level from family, community, hool and local government, thus forming an elastic REDILA network!

### Vision of REDILA

A sustained cost effective and appropriate Library & Information Service to accommodate the needs of information seekers and maintain a reading culture in society.

### Mission of REDILA

To promote and provide reading resources with appropriate training, facilities and infrastructure for an information driven s ety.

## Goals of REDILA

1. To project libraries as dynamic facilities, places of opportunity, instruments for democracy and bridges to the world.
2. To present a platform for advocacy and sensitization in order to solicit for more funding to promote libraries.
3. To promote increased use of libraries and information services.
4. To develop a forum continuing education, recreation and intellectual discourse in society.
5. To make books and other information resources available to children, especially in rural areas.
6. To improve academic performance in schools by supplementing formal education.
7. To inculcate good reading habits and a love o books in young people.
8. To sensitize the community on the necessity for reading and the fundamental importance of knowledge to the community.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward as strategies to boost effective readership in Nigeria.

Basic library and information service instruction should be made compulsory from primary schools. Even university educators should be equipped with sound online facilitation skills to engage students across a range of conversational space including online discussion forums. Chat rooms, wikis and blogs for debates and shared knowledge construction. A policy for pedagogical intervention should be formulated.

A Library Bill of Rights should be passed as an instrument to provide uncompromising support for intellectual freedom and provision for all types of libraries.

A library advocacy network comprising students, parents, journalists, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies etc should be formed to speak out to put libraries on the Agenda of Government (Prof. Claudia Lux-IFLA President 2007-2009's tenure programme.

Library professionals must look inwards for continuing professional development and strategies for regenerating the library and information profession in a fast changing working environment.

The same economic climate that is driving recession in the world is affecting Nigerian Libraries, be that as it may, special funds are set aside for broadband awareness and basic education. Librarians should

package proposal in aid of the MDGs that can enhance effective readership.

Technology is an integral part of the access to information and readership. Government should make efforts to ensure that access through technology includes free software applications, multimedia products and websites to students.

## Conclusion

To ensure intellectual freedom and access to information in Nigeria, effective readership must be entrenched. This paper h   advocated that all stakeholders in education, Library and Informa on professionals must promote and encourage the development of libraries and the establishment of permanent and unrestricted access to reading resources in print, non-print and electronic media.