

STRENGTHENING THE ETHICS AND PRACTICE OF LIBRARIANSHIP: ROLES FOR PRACTICING LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper establishes ethics and practice as core values that sustain and safeguard individual behavioral responsibility in the library. In this paper are various ethos and approaches to the dimensions of core value models and the needs for librarians' collaboration with researchers through the systematic approaches to information access and use. Various issues and challenges hindering librarianship practice in Nigerian and the ways to maintaining sustainable service delivery are discussed. The paper also identified the IFLA value-rich basis for ethical standards and the requisite LRCN for the professionals. The role of librarians as information experts and managers in their libraries through self-integrity and professionalism are also emphasized.

Key Words: Ethics, Core values, IFLA, Librarianship, LRCN.

Introduction

In every profession, ethics and practice are core values that guide the employees about what to sustain and how to safeguard it accurately for the well-being of the organization. In many workplaces, ethical codes of conduct are designed to guide organizational policies, practices and decision making for the employees hence knowledge, skills, moral responsibility and integrity are all integral parts of core ethical behavior. Singh (2014) described professional ethics as the science of right conduct and character. In a related view, Adebayo, Akole & Salau (2016) defined ethics as the moral principles and values about what ought to be. Similarly, Medline (2010) stated that ethics are set of guidelines and or values for the conduct of individual behavior in an organization. In another postulation, Adejumo & Oye (2015) declared that in library and information science profession, ethics are prescribed responsibilities of librarians to the individuals, information resources and the general public. This assertion points to information and service as the core values of librarianship. However, from the above definitions, ethics are moral values, principles or appropriate code of conduct that guides employee within the domain of job duties. Ethics may be codified in special documents and when they are so documented, they provide resolutions to ethical glitches in the organization.

Eke (2018) remarked that in the library and information profession, ethics and practice are the expected librarians' core value service provisions for access to quality information resources. According to the author, Core values are the basic qualities a profession advocate to deliver to avoid clashes or glitches. What must be understood here is that core values influence anything that is practiced. In another development, Jatto (2019) stated that in this technology information driven society, library services are evolving with new rules and procedures to governing the ways and manner information users now access and interact with librarians in the use of library resources. In this light, Eke (2019) suggested avoidance of conflicts between the librarians and information users who are digital literate and can obtain and use the information in deep-webs and with those who are unfamiliar with the digital environment. According to the author, librarians today should possess special knowledge and skills of the core values of their service functions to navigate and access information from various databases and be able to share such information.

In standard librarianship practice, ethical code of conduct calls for librarians' awareness of the core library service values to discharge their functional services for the wellbeing of the library and the users. Adebayo, Akole & Salau (2016) citing Gorman (2000) identified certain ethos for librarianship as: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equity of access to recorded knowledge and information, privacy and democracy. These attributes, surely, offer standard ways for the attainment of ideals of the profession. Also in sustenance of her philosophy, the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) in her mission responsibilities, stated its core roles to include:

1. Define who is a librarian
2. Determine the standard of knowledge and skills for aspirants seeking registration
3. Evaluate the standard as situations may demand with time
4. Ensure the creation and preservation of the list of registered librarians with periodic publication of the register
5. Safeguard and uphold discipline within the profession, and
6. Accomplish such other responsibilities as may be delegated to the council from time to time.

Ekoja (2012) acknowledged some approaches that are addressed by code of conducts and ethics for librarians as: privacy, obligations towards individuals and society, Open access and intellectual property, neutrality, personal integrity, Professional skills and responsibilities to colleagues and others. These approaches are to ensure effective design and integration of ethical codes with core values for sustainability and operationalization of librarians' service delivery. In this complex information technology society, codes and ethics are solution to librarians' many dilemmas in their libraries. Obinyan, Omigie & Obinyan (2019) described ethical codes as standard tools use for ensuring a good level of uniformity, reliability, sustainability and comparison of products, processes, methods or materials for guaranteeing quality control. In another development, the American Library Association (ALA) (2008) noted in her basic ethical framework for the provision of

services, the need to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist censorship to library resources. ALA's code respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the users' interest and right holders.

In this paper, attention is on strengthening the ethics and practice of librarianship in Nigeria, the roles of practicing librarians, the challenges or issues in librarianship practice in Nigeria, the IFLA standards and charges for LRCN, among others.

Issues in Librarianship Practice in Nigeria

Globally, information and use are now demanding more flexibility and ethical standards in connecting the resource and maintaining sustainable service delivery than ever before. But in developing countries like Nigeria, various issues still exist. Igun (2013) observes non-recognition of the role of ethical codes in many libraries. A recognizance survey conducted by this writer between October and December, 2020, using twelve randomly selected academic and research libraries uncovered some disheartening issues. First was that, many of the librarians had not recognized the value of ethical codes as vital instrument for improving slip-ups in key areas of practice in their library jobs. Second, some matters of disagreement and conflicts between librarians and the users on access and use of certain library resources remained unresolved because of varied interests and aspirations of the parties.

The problem of adopting new innovations especially in the public libraries remain. Adeleke (2012), Edom & Edom (2013), Ali, Habibu, & Dawha (2019) and Omigie & Bossa (2020) in their separate work affirmed that many traditionally trained librarians in Nigerian libraries have low ethical value aspirations to acquiring new knowledge and skills in modern technologies. Ikenwe & Omigie (2015) posited that in this 21st century, technologies are the access mode to current information. This as the case, it is demoralizing that many public libraries in the country still have no basic technology infrastructural tools for information access and use. This indeed is capable of creating serious resentment among the librarians to acquiring new skills in modern technology as such skills would translate to nothing because of non-application.

Another ethical challenge in the libraries is the non-monitoring of members of the profession by regulatory bodies such as the LRCN, NLA, etc. Olorunsaye & Fagbami (2018) detected that no special agency or association exist to monitor members and address such issues and views in libraries. According to the author, there is no existing evidence of any consequential investigations into issues of non-compliance with ethics and codes among librarians in the profession. Trainings, conferences, workshops or seminars where issues on ethics and standards would be discussed are not sponsored by government or parent libraries. Also, most workshops by LRCN are very expensive, irregular and difficult to attend especially in states with insurgencies.

While librarians in many countries command respect as being in the fore front of building and preserving their country's intellectual heritage, the professionals in Nigeria do not commands any such respect. Okiy (2013) observed that there is general government indifference to library development in the country. Nigerian libraries are poorly funded with many of them in a state of near total collapsed in resources and personnel. This is the

situation which make many people to look down on the profession as an irrelevant industry in nation building.

The problem of poor quality assurance services exist in the libraries. Nwosu & Udo-Anyanwu (2019) hinted on non-adherence to provision of quality services in Nigerian libraries. According to the authors, quality assurance is critical in demonstrating fitness of purpose which entails effectiveness in achieving library goals and high level quality service delivery. Nwosu & Udo-Anyanwu (2019) further postulated that to achieve quality, there is need to adhere to prescribed standards both by the National University Commission (NUC) and the LRCN in terms of equipment, staffing, library resources, funding and services. But today, these issues are still not being seriously addressed.

Yet, is the attitudinal young professionals coming into the profession from the library schools. Majority of these young stars are more interested in quick-money making ventures than practice librarianship. Seriously influenced by the yahoo boys “criminal business actors” and their flamboyant lifestyles in the society, these young professionals are not willing to stay in the library. They want better paying jobs or go the ways of the “yahoo boys”. This is a danger for the future development and management of libraries in the country if nothing urgent is done now.

Nwosu & Udo-Anyanwu (2019) posited that flexible access to quality information and the needs for standard provisions are not thoughtfully guided in most of the Nigerian libraries. For instance, as Oky (2013) observed, in many of the libraries, basic Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure tools are almost nonexistence. In some libraries where they are found, they are either dilapidated or dysfunctional. In addition to this problem, there is weak ethical standard framework to model things into functionalities. This issue requires urgent attention to leverage functional infrastructural service framework for governing sustainable information provisions in the libraries.

IFLA Standard Codes of Ethics

The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) (2012) gave a value-rich bases for the library and information profession to form policies in handling problem issues, improve librarians’ self-knowledge, provide transparency and enhance service functions in libraries. According to IFLA, the summit of librarianship is the need to share information through optimization of access and use of information by all and sundry. IFLA document posited the rational for librarianship as:

- Access to information which is the core functional responsibilities of the librarians’ service delivery.
- Equitable service delivery that eradicates bias in access to information and use.
- Respect for individual privacy especially in the use of persons data, uphold transparency and handle other vices.
- Ensure Open Access and protection of authors and users right by adopting limits to copyright terms.

- Promote professional skills, innovations, integrity and excellent standard services.
- Strive to earn respect, reputation and status for professional members through ethical manners, etc.

Adejumo & Oye (2015) affirmed that Library Associations across the globe have their codes of ethics in similarity with that of IFLA. While IFLA document provides enough flexibility that encourage collaborations and general reference use, core values must be capable of facilitating an effective individual self-assessment. From the dimension of core value models, professionals should be knowledgeable enough using systematic approach to enhance competences, critical thinking, new innovations and collaborations for flexible access and use of quality information. Olorunsaye & Fagbami (2018) posited that librarianship now need librarians that are webmasters to surf and control web-resources within and outside their custody. To create a culture of transparency and trust, library practitioners must demonstrate stronger standard of integrity in upholding ethical values through key practices and systems.

Through digital networking, libraries today, are required to move to where their users are through virtual realities. Eze & Uzoigwe (2013) citing Omekwu and Echezona (2008) also advanced that library services should move to cyber space with unlimited opening and closing hours. This could be achieved through the development of critical strategic digital library infrastructure and resources that would facilitate sustainability of new software system for this purpose. In addition, this approach would require technical staff, appropriate funding and security of the systems which library management should be ready to provide.

Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).

This is the government official regulatory body for librarians' practice in Nigeria. The Council was established in June 1995, but inaugurated in May 2002. With assistance of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the council has taken several steps in efforts at regulating the practice of the library and information profession in Nigeria. Olorunsaye & Fagbami (2018) stated the LRCN requisite qualifications to practice as librarian in Nigeria as:

1. Register with the council with requisite qualifications approved by the LRCN
2. Not being a Nigerian, hold a qualification granted outside Nigeria accepted by the council and by law to practice for all purposes as a librarian in the country in which the qualification was granted; provided that the other country accords Nigerian professional librarians same reciprocal treatment and that person satisfies the council that the person has sufficient practical experience as a librarian
3. Be of good character
4. Not have been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty

Olorunsaye & Fagbami (2018) further stated that there are still many practicing librarians who are not registered with the council and no body enforces or monitors the efficacy of the code of ethics.

Roles for Practicing Librarians

Librarianship in Nigeria have come a long way should move now to where the best professional doggedness that would guide and defy all odds should be practiced for a stronger information library service society. Ekoja (2012) and Obinyan, Omigie & Obinyan (2019) advocated the LRCN to slip-up and monitor librarians. This can be achieved through regular visits to libraries to identify issues and aspirations of the professionals with a view to assisting them in improving or developing best ethical practices. Such a visit could cumulate into immediate brief trainings or workshops that would sensitize the professionals with full scale ethical knowledge and skills to manage issues whenever they arise in their libraries. Again, such program could further widen the librarians' horizon in recognizing the importance or values of ethical codes as vital tool for promoting professionalism in the library industry.

Many writers have recommended libraries in Nigeria digital era with librarians that should be in the forefront advocating Mobile and e-libraries development with priority attention on the primary and secondary schools. Such project is good and would help to showcase the librarians as inevitable agents in the smoothly running of teaching and learning programs in education. As Omigie, Ezegwu & Nwadioha (2018) affirmed, libraries have always been and would continue to be the center of all educational institutions and providing all necessary information resources for sustainable teaching, learning and for self-reliance. In this way, librarianship would come to be esteemed for valued service delivery and this could further promote career choice in librarianship especially among the secondary school students.

Adejumo & Oye (2015) recommended access to copies of the ethical codes to librarians. This is to identify and expose problems which hitherto, may have been beyond the librarians' approach. Furthermore, through this way, the librarians would be able to promote self-integrity and professionalism in respect to users and resources. The disagreement and conflicts that usually exist between the users and librarians would become easy to identify and resolved through ethical knowledge and skills in managing such issues. Also as information experts, the librarians would be able to cultivate the professional attitudes suitable at promoting standard ethical obligations for real professional standards, job commitments, efficiency, effectiveness and arbitration through regular references or consultations. The librarians would also be able to collaborate with researchers in learning and research activities and ensure accurate, relevant and timely provisions of their information needs.

Again, librarians should learn to encourage themselves by embrace training and retraining in new trends in librarianship. Those who resent such programs could be compulsorily retired to allow rooms for the digital professionals from the library schools to be injected into the system. By this, the digital youngsters would be encouraged to develop themselves to be webmasters to navigate and control web resources. Such young professionals could further be developed into cyber security experts for the security of

their library systems. Omigie and Nwadioha (2017) remarked, librarians should be able to monitor what comes into their systems and return any threat back to sender. This call is imperative as it would be cost effective for the libraries in securing their information resources. Following this, should be the need to ensure security and sustainability through inclusion of cyber security courses in the library school curriculum and benchmarks. The LRCN should champion this cause through conscious review and adjustment of her activities for the profession.

Igun (2013) stated that in this digital era, the evolution of modern technology is seriously impacting the library environment. In this way, the librarians should be encouraged in striving for greater excellence in enhancing their knowledge and skills on their jobs through professional development at the slightest opportunity. As Ikenwe & Omigie (2015) remarked, librarians must recognize their professional expectations and exercise significant influence or control over information through higher level of digital collections, organization and service provisions. This could be attained through equitable service policies, equitable access, accurate and unbiased courteous responses to new trends in the library industry. Further still, the librarians must learn to regard colleagues with respect, fairness, faith and trust for the welfare of all in the profession.

The LRCN should also pursue for the inclusion of Ethics and Standards as a course in library schools' curriculum and benchmarks. This would expose the students early enough to the professional core values that would enhance the students' performances during their Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and equip the students with better knowledge and skills in managing ethical issues by applying sustainable radical innovations that would foster new aspirations for potential membership of the profession in their later work places.

Conclusion

Ethical codes and values for librarianship practice must be seen at all times as the basic virtues of the profession that must be addressed and respected by all members. It must be realized that in this information society, ethical standards and core values are the driving force for the best practices of professionalism. Library and information science is a key information service industry whose experts' knowledge and activities must be guided through ethical codes for self-integrity and professionalism. The librarians must prize themselves high through adherence to their professional ethics and standards for better service conveyance. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and LRCN must work together in ensuring an enhanced sustainable built library environment that would continue in redefining the profession for the future.

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