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COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A TREND OR A NEED?

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Abstract

Library and Information Science (LIS) education in Nigeria is coming of age not younger than most developing countries of the world. LIS schools abroad are forming collaboration and networking (CN) forum at the regional and national levels, thus, addressing resource limitations, standards and practices, among other weaknesses. But it is not the same in Nigeria neither is it clear if the initiative is a need or a mere trend. This paper therefore examined the situation and found reasons why CN is most importantly a need for Nigerian LIS educators to adopt, hence suggested potential ways of achieving success in it.

Keywords: *Library and Information Science, Education, Collaboration and Networking, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Library and Information Science (LIS) education in Nigeria is not younger than those of most developing countries of the world and can therefore be said to have come of age. Trends in regional, national and international collaboration and networking (CN) among LIS educators are contributing to the growth and sustainability of this area of education.

It is also generating innovative ways of addressing resource limitations and other weaknesses. While developing countries like India, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, are striving to meet up with Europe and North America countries (Chaudhry, 2007), developing countries in Africa like Zimbabwe and Kenya, and South Africa, are also improving CN activities in their education (Nyambi, 2011). This situation however, is not the same in Nigeria in spite of the emergent popularity of her LIS education and the concern of members of the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE) in recent times.

Embarking on this study demands putting forward some positional statement of words or phrases contained in the title. The notion of the research in the use of collaboration, networking,

trend and need are fundamentally presented here. According to Winer (1995) "collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone". Information sharing in order to learn from each other or from one party is the bedrock of collaboration (Lin, 2004). A good collaboration must factor intentionality, context and agency aspect of learning (Hart, 2009), which according to Jarcho (2009) is the conceptualization that the self, the group and the organization are players in an effective collaborative circle. Therefore, to work jointly with others or together particularly in an intellectual endeavour in order to achieve certain acceptable standards through a process of joint decision-making constitute the concept of collaboration in this paper.

Networking is a two faceted term which means the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions. It can also refer to the establishment or use of a computer network (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus(www.Marriam-Webster's.com)). Dablio (2007) stated that networking is the art of linking groups of individuals or organizations who "share a common interest or concern that will contribute to knowledge, experience and resources for joint learning and action" towards achieving a common purpose. In this study, networking is viewed from the learning concept. Since learning is a social activity that is facilitated through interaction and engagement over time, humans are connected to each other through networks which are socially constructed and maintained becomes the concept of networking (Downes, 2005). This has to do with forming and promoting connections of individuals which are seen as "nodes or hubs" connected to each other, mediated by technological tools (Siemens 2005; Johnson, 2008).

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English (2006) has it that "trend" is a style or preference for something. It is the general movement over time of statistically detestable change. Trend represents a new fashion or style of practice in LIS education. Meanwhile, "need" is a lack of something required. It is a desire that is hoped to be useful if acquired. To have need of something means to be in want of that thing because of its indispensability. Hence, the concept of need in this paper points at a necessity of a requirement expected to settle what is yearned for.

Review of Literature

The potential benefits of CN for enhancing the quality and diversity of LIS education and tackling specific problems being faced by the discipline, such as limited resources, have been well documented in the literature. Chung, *et al* (2009) discovered a relationship between intellectual collaboration and intellectual output. Lin (2004) showed that LIS educators in East Asia formed discussion groups as a way of communicating new ideas, sharing knowledge and other vital information. The European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCILD) project report (2005) revealed how CN activities contribute to the structure and content formation of LIS curriculum in Europe. Al-Suqri (2010) found the benefit in CN when he examined the status of CN in Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) States. Chaudhry (2007) opines that CN is fast improving the quality of education in general. Gunawardena, *et al* (2010) writes that CN is a vital tool for researchers to enable them advance scientific research. Omenn (2006) says that the adoption of CN activities is increasingly more indispensable in today's knowledge society where communities face "grand challenges". The grand challenges revealed itself as many research goals requiring the combined efforts of several scientists from several domains, each

providing complementary expertise. Kigongo-Bukenya and Musoke (2011) maintain that CN is one of the vital remedies to the challenges facing LIS education in developing countries. They stated that CN, which is all about sharing, togetherness, exchanging and enriching one another, is a need for LIS educators to share new technologies aimed at improving productivity, share human expertise, minimise costs, evaluate the coherence of information technology, and monitor changes for effective training of professionals.

Furthermore, Chaudhry (2007) writes that CN is a growing trend in Library and Information Science Education in the developed nations, with developing countries queuing along from informal communications within loose networks of LIS professionals to highly structured programmes conducted under the auspices of governments and inter-governmental organizations. Ocholla (2007) reports that some developed CN examples include joint research, faculty and student exchange schemes and visiting fellowships, conferences and workshops, shared online resources, electronic forums, and learning accreditation and other general standards. Dablio (2007) opines that the standards setting, monitoring of colleagues activities, orientating, clarifying and all other methods of seeking and giving of information pertaining to the training of LIS professionals is a crucial benefit derivable in CN. By sharing knowledge, resources and expertise through CN, LIS departments can expand the range of courses, training and services they offer to ensure that all important topics are covered. This will aid LIS professionals to keep up to date with developments and changes in the profession, and to provide opportunities for joint research which capitalizes on their respective areas of specialist interest and expertise (Kuhn and Milam, 2004).

As a matter of fact, Ocholla (2007) states that departments scan pool their experience, knowledge and creativity in order to identify and effectively implement solutions to the particular issues and problems facing LIS education in their particular region.

On a strictly practical note, Fan (2006) notes that resource-sharing and other co-operative actions, which are the concepts of CN, would free up time for "more necessary things". In general, CN has become such a major feature of LIS education on a global scale that LIS schools in Nigeria must participate in order to keep pace with international quality standards in research, education and services.

Hence, there is no gainsaying that the LIS education environment globally has been experiencing changes as departments expand and get used to their teaching and services to changing user needs, rapid technological change and the internationalization of the higher education environment. Besides, the adoption of CN is more urgent than expected as government is not meeting up to her funding of education in developing countries (Abdullahi, *et al*, 2006; Virkus, 2007).

Why CN in Nigerian LIS Education?

There are eight (8) LIS schools in Nigeria (Ocholla, 2011). This year, the Education and Training Section of International Federation of Library Association (IFLA), is calling for the internationalization of LIS schools in all fronts (<http://www.ifla.org/en/news/call-for-papers-library-theory-and-research-with-education-and-training>). This is a programme that Nigerian LIS schools can take advantage of, if they had common internet network to identify them.

In the Nigerian LIS environment, activities like joint research among colleagues are uncommon. Substandard instructional materials are littered everywhere. The few current reading materials are scarcely available in some regions of the country. Younger lecturers are copying and re-copying intellectual works of the older dons, which is not a good omen for the future of LIS education. Nigerian LIS students cannot check on the web to see what is approved as core text for them, which results in not having a common base for all reading and teaching resources for the students. Yet, this is one benefit enjoyed by their counterparts in the developed countries (Zach and Agosto, 2009).

Moreover, in recent times, LIS graduates in Nigeria have brought up the differences in title of awards in their degree certificates. This issue generated worry among members of the NIA-Online-forum around mid last year. It was found that among Nigerian LIS graduates, certificates read various awards like Bachelor of Library Science (BLS), Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS), Bachelor of Library Studies (BLS), Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Bachelor of Information Science (BIS). As contributors argued from various perspectives, some opined that the award of BLS is antiquated. Others commented that BLIS and BIS were contemporary titles for LIS graduates, which suits today's information society. But some others pointed to the differences in the curriculum content of various schools as underlining basis for the title of their awards. This discrepancy does not arise in a teaching community where CN is practiced (EUCILD project report, 2005). This has also affected the titles of LIS departments and the faculties they are housed. Sadly, this dissimilarity has continued till today and as result, there is need for the setting of standards that would guide all the LIS schools in Nigerian universities.

Furthermore, unlike what is observable among LIS educators abroad, where their teaching and research data and other professional information are collated and built into a discussable domain (Lin, 2004), Nigerian LIS lecturers are either known by their name through the literature or seen physically in the institutions they lecture. This is not a good public awareness of who they are in the academia. Apart from NALISE, there is no other formal or informal domain, particularly an electronic site where Nigerian LIS educators are mirrored. The pictures, qualifications, special interest, contributions to knowledge and general activities of LIS educators of Nigeria cannot be accessed collectively and speedily. Scholarly activities like exchange schemes and fellowships appointments has never been on standards adopted abroad as revealed by Ocholla (2007). For instance, fellowship appointments of Nigerian LIS educators are often informal, usually adjudged in the friendship perspective rather than dispassionate assessment of professionals through a look-up of their profiles on the internet.

Moreover, the invisibility of Nigerian LIS educators in accreditation exercise of LIS programmes in Nigeria is another problem and also a gap that CN activities fill (Ocholla, 2007). To make it worse, disparity among colleagues based on LIS schools attended and quality of training obtained is common in Nigeria. For instance, colleagues who graduated from LIS schools in east of Nigeria are looked down by counterparts in the southern region. It is a sad scenario that is even seen among the educators themselves. This calls for the urgency of CN adoption in LIS education, especially now that younger professionals in developing countries are becoming curious about the future of the profession (Singh and Malhan, 2010). From the foregoing, it will appear that adopting CN in LIS education in Nigeria shall go a long way to solve these anomalies, prepare the discipline to partake off the knowledge society of today, as well meet the future of LIS international education.

Benefits of CN to Nigerian LIS Education

As literature has revealed, CN in Nigerian LIS education would profit the educators, Students, profession and Nigerian Education

The Educators

CN would strengthen the effort of NALISE towards a common LIS curriculum development. The situations where various LIS schools work in isolation of each other in curriculum design, implementation, evaluation and review would be reduced. The CN forum would enable the consortium to address this incongruity. LIS educators in Nigeria will be able to share teaching resources among themselves. LIS educators in Nigerian universities would be visible to one another. Collaborative research and teaching would be very easier and possible. While fellowship appointments would improve, educational development would become competitive and rewarding to the future of librarianship. "Half baked" educators will no longer fit into the system, and as a results, would give way. Thus, sanity will be restored in the LIS teaching profession. The Library schools in Nigeria would begin to share human expertise, minimize costs of teaching and research visits, evaluate the coherence of information technology, and monitor changes in the LIS education.

The Students

Classroom based discussion forum will be achieved. Students in various parts of the country would be able to relate with each other online, share classroom comments, discuss course related issues and generally chat about LIS education. would also share links for reading materials. They can also engage in joint seminars, online tutorials, among others.

The profession

The LIS Education will experience a new accreditation scheme that will guide both new and existing schools in all levels of accreditation. Chaudhry (2007) asserts that these levels of accreditation are recognition, assessment, endorsement and accreditation. International standards in the profession are likely to be met when there is a network of programmes than when there is not. Hence, CN adoption would help Nigerian LIS education come of standard to international requirements. CN adoption and practice would help the Nigerian library profession attain global level of mutual accreditation system for LIS professional degrees and qualifications which is the wish of the Education and Training Section (SET) of International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Miwa, *et al* (2011) narrates that this initiative, stresses the outcome-based evaluation of the professional knowledge and skills of graduates of LIS (degrees and qualifications) rather than curricula and contents of educational programs. With CN adoption, standard practices would be easily enforced. For instance, the curricula issues of various LIS schools such as review, research and lecturing methods shall be set to anchor on a prevailing guideline.

The Nigerian Education

It will be a welcomed development to the nation's educational system. Other professions would likely tow the same line and gradually the education model of Nigeria would become standard world class..

Conclusion and Recommendations

LIS education in Nigeria which is younger than those of most developed countries of the world is coming of age. CN stresses mutual agreement of LIS educators and schools in Nigeria as a means for connecting with each other in an ICT-aided network so as to work together for the standardization, oneness and realization of a national and international set of goal in librarianship. LIS schools abroad are adopting CN to tackle the challenges of resources limitation, exchange of expertise, standards and accreditation, among other challenges facing the profession. In Nigeria, such experience is at variance with that obtainable in the developed nations. The result is that researchers wonder if the initiative is a need in today's librarianship or a mere trend. This study has shown that CN is very important for the standardisation and growth of the library and information science education in Nigeria. Many LIS schools and educators in the developed nations have adopted CN. In Nigeria, factors like dissimilarity in degree awards, poor communication, access to good reading resources, invisibility of the educators, amongst others, are justified reasons why CN is needed in the LIS education.

It is recommended that LIS educators in Nigeria should form a consortium. The NALISE platform would be an appropriate platform for the planning and implementation of the consortium. The variation in curriculum, degree titles, and other teaching and professional limitations should be addressed. A committee should be formed among the NALISE members to develop a web portal or website for LIS education program in Nigeria. How would they go about it? They are to hire a web designer, narrate what they want, get the initial cost shared among members and thereafter set up modalities for pulling the little cost of maintaining the site monthly or annually. The developed LIS webpage should be able to serve as a gateway to LIS education in Nigeria. The web site will contain the list LIS schools in Nigeria, their programmes and curriculum, and the bio-data of their educators. Other teaching and learning information should also be hosted in the website. In addition, member schools should set up a repository of learning resources to facilitate the sharing of teaching materials and faculty contact lists. Most importantly, the website should contain an interactive portal for communication to and among members. The committee should work with heads or representatives of each LIS school in Nigeria for easy data gathering. This model should be a growing venture.

Finally, while the educators enhance their collaboration to establish common standards to guide degrees and qualifications and thereby improve LIS education, students' participation in the network should be encouraged in individual schools. This is in line with similar practices in LIS schools abroad to see LIS students on Industrial Training (IT) or Information and Communication Technology practical (ICT practical lecture section) develop a website or discussion portals for their departments.

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