

Significance and Challenges of the Nigerian Library Association to the Development of Library and Information Profession in Nigeria: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper provides a literature review on the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) to the development of library and information profession in Nigeria. It examines the concept of Library Associations and reviews works of literature on the significance of library associations and the Nigerian Library Association for improved professional development in Nigeria. The literature also explored the challenges faced by the Nigerian Library Association towards the development of the library profession. The paper concluded by stressing that for a better and meaningful professional development, the NLA should directly partner with government at all levels for a holistic approach in order to expedite action while designing new policies. The Association should regularly organise and coordinate workshops, seminars and short training courses for members on current trends as not all members participate in NLA annual conferences. NLA should re-strategise its mission objective to improve on the general attainment of NLA objectives in Nigeria.

Keywords: Development, Challenges, Information Profession, Library Associations

Introduction

Library Associations at local, national, regional and international levels are of great importance to libraries, the profession and society. An association's mandates serve as a roadmap to operate both at the international and local levels. For instance, at the global level, there exists the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), American Library Association (ALA), Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the like. While at the local level, the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and other related associations such as the Association of Government Libraries (AGOL), Nigeria Association of Law Libraries (NALL) and Nigeria School Library Association (NSLA) abound. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is the leading international body representing the interest of their members worldwide. It is a global voice of the library and information profession.

In Nigeria, NLA is providing leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services as well as enhancing professional learning and ensures access to information for all. The body in Nigeria serves as the umbrella organisation for persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services. It seeks, among other things to promote the establishment and development of libraries and to assist in the promotion

of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria.

Nigerian Library Association (NLA) before now is the recognised body that coordinated the activities of librarians in Nigeria. Despite this role, it has not been able to achieve much in terms of effecting National compliance with its decision or regulations. Dowling (2014) confirms that continuous learning is critical to renewing the expertise and skills needed to teach and assist library users in the new information age. He, however, stated that education and continuous learning should be one of the key action areas that must be adopted by the Nigeria Library Association in promoting the highest quality library and information services for all people. Its role should be to provide librarians and library staff with opportunities for professional development, promote continuous lifelong learning for all people. The Nigerian Library Association should also promote the highest quality library services, providing leadership and support for both the professional education of librarians and the development of library programmes and services that support continuous learning for the general public.

It was earlier noted that the continued non-legal recognition of the Nigerian Library profession had created many challenges to the profession. The Nigerian Library Association in the past was prevented from exercising any influence on education and training of librarians, and also from regulating the professional practices of librarians. Anyone can pose as a librarian without undergoing the required professional study. In the past, the word "Librarian" was abused and denigrated. The turning point in the history of librarianship in the country was the UNESCO Seminar on Public Library Development in Africa held in Ibadan in 1953. Aguolu and Muhammad (2010) observed that "it laid the foundation of modern libraries in Nigeria and helped crystallise the concept of the library profession and librarianship itself". On the other hand, it has given rise to issues of professional practice; professional development; membership background towards achieving its stated objectives in the association.

Significance of the Nigerian Library Association to the Development of Library Profession in Nigeria

Associations are, in a real sense, non-profit organisations seeking to further a particular profession to bring about significant development to their members. In many nations, librarians have joined together to form professional associations. It is an organisation formed to unite and inform people who work in the same occupation. Woody (2012) asserted that there is no standard constitution which defined such an organisation. Some devoted themselves to the interest of their members, to the point where they may even become registered as trades unions. In contrast, others are learned societies that function purely to unify, standardise and promote research, monitor standards as well as updating skills for practising professionals. A significant role for many professional associations is to control the issuing of professional qualifications or even issuing a license to practice (chartered). Others take on the disciplinary role over members of their profession, and others maintain ethical standards. Doyle (2015) defined professional association as an organisation whose members have similar credentials or interest. Harvey (2014) considered professional association as a group of people in a learned occupation who are

entrusted with maintaining, controlling or oversight of the legitimate practice of their occupation. Professional associations were also defined by The Australian Council of Professions (2012) as a professional body represents a profession when it is a body formally constituted for this purpose and comprises a substantial number of practitioners in a defined field. Associations are recognised as a definitive aspect of a profession by trait theory, a popular approach to defining professions (Rubin, 2000).

Among the key significant aspects that define and identify a professional association is the existence of an effective code of conduct, which is regarded as an important way to enhance the status of the profession. A code of conduct outlines how to be professional, the code "essentially instrumentalists' code of ethics, making clear the applications of ethical concepts in everyday professional practices" (Freeman, 1996). It can provide a strong central defining function, contributing to the overall identity of the profession itself.

Harvey and Mason (2013) identified significant importance of professional association as a body acting to safeguard the public interest of an organisation, which represents the interest of practitioners, acting to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body. Professional Association set ethical standards and standard of professional conduct for members, which include benchmarks and best practices (Harvey, 2014). Library association encourages lifelong learning through training courses on a regularly scheduled basis for their members (Enser, 2012).

On the other hand, the profession is the code of conduct regarded as an important way to increase the status of the profession (Chavalit, 2002). Freeman (1996) observed that ethics in LIS maintain the good relationship between Library professionals and users. For the development of the profession, ethics is important as it strengthens co-operation and co-ordination among library professionals. It also develops a good relationship with colleagues and other members of the profession as well as promote excellence among library professionals. On the specific significance of library association, Harvey, Mason and Ward (2013) listed three significant roles for professional and regulating bodies as First, they are set up to safeguard the public interest. This is what gives them their legitimacy. Second, professional bodies (but not regulating bodies) present the interest of the professional practitioners and here they act as a professional association or trade union (including legitimising restrictive practices), or as a learned society contributing to continuous professional development. Third, the professional body represents its self-interest; the organisations act to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body. Dowling and Moore (2001) affirmed that Library Associations play significant roles in influencing government policy and developing professional policies and standards. Similarly, Lamptey (2011) stated the significance of library associations as follows:

- Provide support for continuing professional development through learning opportunities
- Provide a network for professionals to meet and discuss their field of expertise
- Publish professional journals or magazines
- Issue code of conduct to guide the professional behaviour
- Set and assess professional examinations

- Deal with complaints against professionals and implement a disciplinary procedure
- Provide career support and opportunities for students, graduates and people already working

Associations address their significance with varying level of success, their future lies in how they deal with today's needs and expectations and the strategies they develop to sustain them. Susan (2013) described the importance of the Nigerian library association. According to her, "NLA support members of library profession through the accreditation of their formal education, on-going certification, the provision of CPD and training, networks, publications, opportunities to participate in the work of committees, working groups and the provision of standards and guidelines". She further advanced that:

Professional library associations have an advocacy role in ensuring that the appropriate representatives understand the profession at various levels of government responsible for the allocation of funding for libraries and by those in public and private sector organisations that employ members of the profession. Such advocacy extends to the users of libraries and information services; those in our communities who use school and public libraries, the academic communities that use university libraries and information users in organisations and institutions.

As the profession changes and evolves, so must the professional associations. It is the professional associations that set out the "body of knowledge, set of skills and competencies and set of shared or core values" for the profession (Davis, 2008) and each of these components must remain aligned with the profession. Watson (2012) suggested that professional bodies use the rhetoric of professionalism to 'reinvent' themselves, where there is a disconnect between members of the profession and the association then the association becomes less than representative. There is a need for close bonds between members of a changing profession and the association so that they change in line with one another. Noordegraaf (2011) worked on the relationship between the changing organisational requirements of professions and the resultant changes in what members need from their professional associations and suggested that "professional associations, as non-organising forms of social organising, are crucial for construing and organising members. They create and symbolise professional behaviour and practices. They bring together professional workers, define professional work, establish boundaries and demarcate fields, standardise work methods and form professional loyalties" (Noordegraaf, 2011).

In the same vein, Richards (2012) asserted that "professional associations responsibilities include keeping up with innovations, developments, knowledge and disseminating this through communications, publications, conferences, seminars, and training processes; and the creation and facilitation of networks to enable members to connect and communicate with one another". Today, one can achieve association through formal and informal networks; these include non-library groups and associations, physical and virtual, professional and social, subject or discipline-specific associations and networks. Each of which connects us with colleagues that

provide sources of ideas, expertise and reference. Social media networks such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook now provide flexible ways of connecting and communicating.

Library associations worldwide have unique significance for promoting and enhancing libraries, librarians as well as encouraging their community of users. Library associations should not only promote traditional library activities such as the promotion of reading and literacy but also serve as progressive forces for change. Relatively, Rice (2013) stated the practical significance of library associations which cannot be separated from those of NLA as:

- Establishing and monitoring industry standards and professional codes of practice.
- Advising educational institutions on curriculum development.
- Promoting and providing professional and career development activities.
- Providing a forum for member networking.
- Promoting the profession in the community.
- Providing career information to prospective members and students.
- Assisting graduates with career planning and job seeking.
- Maintaining a professional library for members and
- Producing regular publications on professional and industry issues, for examples, newsletters or magazines/journals.

Summing from the foregoing, Wisconsin Library Association (2015) recognises the broad significance of library associations as to communicate that library and information services address essential informational, educational, cultural and recreational needs for both professionals and users. Also, to support efforts to assure the public access to the broad range of views about issues of importance to them, as well as taking positions on current critical issues related to library and information services. It is based on this premise that this study subjects NLA's development to assessment in order to find out whether or not it has achieved its objectives as perceived by its professional membership.

Challenges faced by the Nigerian Library Association Towards Library Professional Development in Nigeria

Library professionals expect their association to move forward and monitor progress, especially its activities. This can blur the boundaries of the professional realm and can change members' perceptions and expectations. According to Harvey and Mason (2011), a professional association is a body acting to safeguard the public interest of an organisation, which represents the interest of the professional practitioners, acting to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body. Relatively, Halsey et al. (2010) wrote that Librarians, like members of other professions, have banded together in professional associations to solve common problems and to advance their profession. These professionals address issues such as training opportunities, career development, educational seminar, workshop and conference, mentoring and financial support. They also attempt to influence legislation that affects libraries,

establish policies and standards relating to libraries and librarians and supports Continuing Education for Librarians (Halsey et al., 2010).

Bala (2011) asserted that "the role of a library association such as the Nigerian Library Association is always significant to the development of the library profession as well as its strategic services". However, he challenged the Association (NLA) as being dormant, non-assertive and nonchalant, though very active in organising a yearly conference that hardly produced meaningful changes in the profession and the status of libraries. The NLA has failed to make a substantial impact on the profession and its members, especially in other chapters in the country. The effect is that libraries and the profession, in general, are marginalised. This state of affairs does not augur well for the provision of strategic library services and systems. The passive role of the association in other parts of the country is another most significant challenge currently affecting the chapters, especially in areas of seminars, workshops, and empowerment opportunities.

On the other hand, the visibility of the association is abysmal. According to the study conducted by Unegbu (2013), a good number of professional librarians in Abia State complained that the association is not visible. She aligned the facts with the reasons explained by Black Herald Magazine (2007) which did not enlist NLA among the list of professional associations in Nigeria.

Also, the study was undertaken by Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri (2011) titled "Professional Visibility of the Nigerian Library Association", identified the termed professional visibility as expresses recognition and the general state at which a profession is perceived. However, they seem to observe that people in Nigeria do not know about the Nigerian Library Association. One can regularly hear people in Nigeria mention other professional associations like Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and the like, without easily including Nigerian Library Association. Some of these bodies, just like NLA does not conduct certificate examinations as membership criteria other than the relevant University Degree, practising experience and registration requirement for their membership, yet they are well-known more than NLA. The study recommended some ways of enhancing the visibility of the association by seeking the views of librarians. The association should institute a professional school through legislation and not by payment of annual dues, and the body should find her perceptible niche in the Nigerian community. The present leadership of the association should critically consider the suggestion of librarians towards attaining a visible and vibrant association for the Library and Information Profession in Nigeria. Also, they further recommended investigations on this subject matter in other states in Nigeria and the collection of suggestions and opinions of librarians in order to help build and strengthen the image of NLA in Nigeria.

Lack of training opportunities by state chapters of the association has directly affected professional development. This is why Oketunji (2011) observed this very clearly in his remarks that the far-reaching challenges that the library environment holds for library professionals have been affected by the association's ineffectiveness and inconsistent programmes in various state chapters. This led to a situation whereby changes in the current chapter became imperative for

vibrant and consistent programmes and activities. NLA chapters can participate and anticipate the future needs of LIS professionals in bridging the gap between members, particularly in the use of current trends and technology for their professional development through workshops and seminars. There is the need for the library association to fulfil its role by coordinating and harnessing the professional responsibilities in bringing out a harmonious development of the profession and library information services in Nigeria.

Unegbu and Onuoha (2013) contributed to this notion based on their assessment of the association's influence on professionals and society. They observed that the impact of the association would only be felt if it is known, seen and heard. Knowing the organisation means that the organisation is well publicised. Do people talk about LIS in any government gathering? Does the association float any journal or newsletter? Does the association have an office with paid staff? Does the association have a regulatory body to ensure adherence to standard rules and regulations? Is the association recognised worldwide? These are the measures to be taken to be known in society. Which of these does the association do in order to be visible and noticeable? There is a need for library associations to be part of national development by advising the government on issues that relate to the library profession. Just recently, Nigeria passed Freedom of Information Bill, what contribution to the debate for the bill did LIS association give? The study recommended that the LIS profession should not be a dumping ground where drop-outs find solace. It is high time that LIS courses are taught in Secondary Schools, the reason for lack of initial awareness from students may not arise. LIS association should make deliberate efforts to advertise LIS courses in Secondary Schools so that prospective candidates will choose it from the outset, then canvassing for students to change in order to come to LIS, or LIS departments admitting leftover or reject from other departments. It should not be a dumping ground for rejects; it should be made attractive, to be envied by others. Innovation is the solution to this deplorable condition. The study of Oderinde (1969), Aguolu (1976), Bala (2011), Lamtey (2011), Bhatti (2012), Brown (2013), Womboh (2013) and Inusa (2014) had all reported a similar situation.

In conclusion, it is central to understand that whatever the criticism of professional associations, they do provide a framework within which librarians can work together on a common interest (ALA, 2013). Challenges can be overcome with the support of the professional body working in the country to organise useful training courses, seminars and conferences, sound policies and regulations which may help in preparing well-versed librarians in every part of the country (Brown, 2013). The implication of the identified challenges will remain and can retard the objective and progress of the association if not adequately addressed. Calling for co-operation among stakeholders and other professional library association in addressing the challenges, NLA offers an excellent platform that would allow its members nationwide to participate and explore their potentials. From the reviewed literature, none assessed NLA objectives. However, the researcher finds it imperative in this study to present itself in order to assess members' perception of the attainment of NLA objectives in order to fill the gap and also identify significant challenges faced by NLA in the development of the library profession in Nigeria.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The review of related literature has proven to be useful in determining the role and tasks accomplished by NLA in fostering professional and library development in the country. The key points emerged that NLA has a crucial role in making the LIS community trustworthy professional-oriented/entity. It shows that NLA still has a long way to go for improving their goals, policies and programmes in order to synchronise all stakeholders for bringing innovation and changes as well as its developmental paradigm in LIS. The challenges mentioned above, if addressed, will further improve the achievement level of NLA. This is because, with adequate participation and funding, the association will thrive, provided that NLA members can understand and respond to the challenges taking place in the association. It concluded that NLA served as the primary voice for the profession of librarianship as it is the only platform that leads towards development, promotion and improvement of library services and also supports the interest of members at all levels.

However, the following recommendations are at this moment advanced: there is need to use member's opinions and be taken into consideration as it will improve on the general attainment level of NLA objectives. NLA should directly partner with government at all levels for a holistic approach in order to expedite action required while designing new policies in order to resolve issues and move the association forward. This will enable the association to have a roadmap for actions that will possibly move the association towards realising its mission statements. The association should regularly organise workshops, seminars and short training courses for members on current developments and new trends in the profession at both local and national levels. This will positively improve members' professional development as not all NLA members participate in NLA annual conferences. NLA should increase the number and variety of the association's goals, opportunities as well as making every effort to provide structured and facilitated programmes as a guideline for success and positive, measurable outcomes. This can positively add to its existing achievements. Again, NLA should provide a forum for discussions, lists on a range of issues for association and branch chapters across the country in order to address those issues and challenges. As a way of keeping the Association viva rant and top financial status, NLA should re-strategise its mission objectives to deliver the highest quality professional development and attractive programmes for its members through investing and prompt payment of dues by members in order to render full professional services.

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