

ENTRENCHING CORE VALUES IN LIBRARIANSHIP: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD

By

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Prof. A. J. C. Mole****Abstract**

This study was designed to examine the importance of entrenching core values in librarianship in Nigeria. The study looks at the history of Librarianship, development of the Core Values: Controversy from the Onset. Core Values of Librarianship, Impact of perception of librarianship's core values on professional practice of librarians. The study revealed the following core value of librarianship to include: protection of personal data; privacy and confidentiality; equal treatment of users; and intellectual freedom. Also, factors responsible for low practice of Information Ethics (IE) by librarians were established to be; lack of exposure to a course specifically on Information Ethics in most Nigerian library; low level of enforcement of ethical conducts by library management; concern for self-survival at the expense of rule of law; and low awareness and promotion of professional code of ethics by professional associations. Effects of perception on practice of Information Ethics by librarians were also revealed. One of the recommendations made was that all library governing councils in Nigeria and Africa should create a high level of awareness of Information Ethics and criminalize violation of professional ethics among librarians because such acts affect core values of librarianship as a profession.

Key Words: Core Values of Librarianship, Discipline, Information Ethics, Professional Ethics, Librarians

Introduction

The history of librarianship in Nigeria dates back to the 1900s. However, the UNESCO Seminar in Ibadan in 1953 marked the turning point for librarianship in Nigeria leading to the establishing of libraries across the West African sub-region and the formation of the West African Library Association (WALA). From the 1960s, however, more libraries were established leading to the formation of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962. Thereafter, the Association grew steadily in numbers and strength leading to the need for a regulatory body.

At this stage, librarianship was like an all-comers affair where any staff in the library was seen and addressed as a librarian. Therefore, it became necessary to formally define who is a

librarian. At the same time, it was becoming fashionable for professionals to have a body to regulate the practice of their profession in Nigeria. This led to the establishment of regulatory agencies such as the Pharmacy Council; Veterinary Council of Nigeria; Nursing Council; Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria; Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria and Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria.

Consequently, the Nigerian Library Association leadership began the process to establish a regulatory body for the Library and Information Science profession. To this end, a Committee was set up in 1975 with Mr. E. B. Bankole as Chairman during the Association's Annual Conference in Badagry, Nigeria which was presided over by Alhaji Abdullahi Haruna Ningi. Advocacy efforts continued through the years until 1995 when during the tenure of Mr. Gboyega Banjo as President of the NLA, Decree 12 of 1995 establishing the Librarians' (Registration, etc.) Council of Nigeria, was signed into law by General Sani Abacha, then Head of State. It was a defining moment for librarians and it signaled the official recognition of the profession to be at par with other professions like the medical, legal, and engineering profession in Nigeria.

Librarianship is a service-oriented profession which focuses on managing relevant information resources to meet diverse needs of users. The goals of librarianship, particularly its role in transmission of knowledge cannot be achieved without users occupying a huge portion in the process of information services; this preoccupation has implications for how librarianship is and will be practiced. Besides possessing knowledge and expertise in information content and users' information seeking behavior, librarians now need to be comfortable in online environment and be familiar with ethical issues involved. Librarianship is central to academic activities in higher institutions globally because academic libraries are information and

knowledge warehouse where resources of diverse formats are managed to meet users' needs. Information profession today demands much more thought and effort on connecting with users and maintaining the relationship due to technological and societal changes. As noted by Mathiesen and Fallis (2008), the role of the librarian is to provide access to information; librarians vary in their activities depending on the goal of such access.

To do this effectively, ethics of the profession must be observed and adhered to by librarians in the quest to satisfy Users; these ethics are designed based on core values of librarianship. Consequent upon her impeccable place among other professions, core values which are the basis for service provisions have to be understood and practiced by the professionals who manage information resources; this is imperative in a community like higher institutions where librarians are faced with ethical issues.

Development of the Core Values: Controversy from the Onset

In everyday life, professionals use their senses to interact with the environment. They can see, touch, smell, hear and taste the external world surrounding them in the course of interactions that by and large occur with an early contact between an organism and its environment. Harvey (2009) described a profession as a group of people in a learned occupation, the members of which agree to abide by specified rules of conduct when practicing the profession. It is further described as a vocation founded upon specialized educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested counsel and services to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain. It is obvious that professional activity involves systematic knowledge and proficiency (Southern Illinois University, 2004). Specifically, professions are distinguished from other occupations.

Sager (2001) described the initial stages of developing the “Core Values of Librarianship” as “one of the most contentious professional issues that arose in 2000” (p. 149). Sager chaired the first Task Force on Core Values, originally appointed to address a recommendation that emerged from the 1999 Congress on Professional Education (CPE). Specifically, the Task Force was mandated to “clarify the core values (credo) of the profession. Although the Association has issued a number of documents that imply values for the profession (e.g., the Code of Ethics, statements on intellectual freedom, and Libraries: An American Value), there is no clear explication to which members can refer and through which decisions can be assessed” (American Library Association, 1999). The Task Force aimed to make clear the values that were at the core of the profession of librarianship.

The assigned work of the Task Force was daunting, and some considered it to be impossible (Budd, 2008; Koehler, 2003; Sager, 2001). They were tasked with identifying and succinctly articulating what values were at the core of an incredibly diverse profession made up of a wide array of types of professional librarians who serve even more diverse populations of users. However, only one year after being tasked with this job, the Task Force presented “Librarianship and Information Service: A Statement on Core Values” at the 2001 ALA Annual Conference on March 25, 2000. The values identified by the Task Force were

- the connection of people to ideas;
- the assurance of free and open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works;
- the commitment to literacy and learning;
- respect for the individuality and diversity of all people;
- freedom for all people to form, hold, and express their own beliefs;
- the preservation of the human record;

- excellence in professional service to our communities;
- the formation of partnerships to advance these ideas.

Discipline in Librarianship: The LRCN Act in Section 16, Subsection 2 also established the Librarians Disciplinary Committee which is to be referred to as ‘The Disciplinary Committee’.

The Committee is charged with the responsibility of considering and determining any case referred to it by the Librarians Investigating Panel.

Penalties for Unprofessional Conduct: The LRCN Act, Section 17 authorizes the LDC to punish a registered librarian where:

- a. He/She is adjudged by the disciplinary committee to be guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect or
- b. He/She is convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere by any court or tribunal having power to award punishment for an offence (whether or not such an offence is punishable with imprisonment) which in the opinion of the disciplinary committee is incompatible with the status of a librarian
- c. The Disciplinary Committee is satisfied that the name of any person has been fraudulently registered.

Penalties for erring librarians may include:

- a. Reprimand
- b. Striking off the name from the register permanently or for a specific period of time.

Core Values of Librarianship

Core values are the basic virtues that every profession upholds; they are anchors that give directions to how the ships of professionals move in a profession. Not only that, core values state

what a profession stands for, what they exist to deliver, and how it would be delivered. These form the principles which are the basics for the code of ethics in a profession. Gorman (2000) highlighted the following as the Core Values of Librarianship: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equity of access to recorded knowledge and information, privacy, and democracy. These lists are the principles that guide activities of information professionals as a way of ensuring that users are treated as customers in the library.

The modalities that guide control librarians' activities are called Information Ethics which is orchestrated by Core Values of Librarianship. Library Associations in different countries have different code of ethics which indicate core values of the profession, close examinations however show similarities in the codes. The Thai Library Association (TLA) code of ethics articulates the core values of the LIS profession, which are commonly shared across the world. The values include “service, access equality, respect, confidentiality and privacy, protection of intellectual property rights, literacy, technical literacy, stewardship, and professional and social obligations” (Thai Library Association (TLA), 2008). One of the key fundamentals of a profession, as pointed by Freeman and Louca (2002) is the availability of an effective code of conduct, which is regarded as an important way to enhance the status of the profession. The code of conduct highlights how to act professionally and ensures applications of ethical concepts in everyday professional practice. Other studies like Chevalit (2002) and TLA (2008) also confirm that code of ethics/conducts point out the core values of Librarianship. The codes outline the duties of the library professional. Declaration of the core values has been established; exploring the practice stated therein is also imperative.

The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values which define, inform, and guide all professional practice. These values reflect the history and ongoing

development of the profession and have been advanced by numerous policy statements of the American Library Association. Among these are: Access; Confidentiality/Privacy; Democracy; Diversity; Education and Lifelong Learning; Intellectual Freedom; Preservation; The Public Good; Professionalism; Service; Social Responsibility (ALA, 2015). As described by Cheong (2008), librarianship is generally considered to be concerned with the principle and practice of selecting, acquiring, organizing, disseminating and providing access to information in accordance with the specific needs of groups of people or an individual. There are other analyses of these core values.

Impact of perception of librarianship's core values on professional practice of librarians

In everyday life, professionals use their senses to interact with the environment. However, psychological processes enable man to perceive concepts from the images based on his past experiences, memory, or judgment. Therefore, psychological processes present the visual events in a meaningful way. Hence, perception deals with these psychological processes that is required to: organize, interpret and give meaning to the output of sense organs (Zadeh, Wang and Kubica, 2010). Considering the ethical stand of professional practice, Ulrich (2011) argued that serving the interests of others in a disinterested rather than self-interested way is still a form of interested action; for its rationality is still oriented to the particular interests of some people, usually those involved rather than to the general interest of all those potentially concerned. An ethos of service always raises the question, service to whom and to whom not? Whichever way, good professional practice needs to be considered regardless of whether in a specific context of professional intervention there actually are some institutional pressures at work (Ulrich, 2007).

As good as these practices are, Ulrich (2006) observed that many professionals shy away from a perception of professional competence that would include its normative foundation in

addition to its technical foundation, and as such a perception clearly entails questions of value judgment and ethical responsibility. Professionals have learned in their training that a good professional, not unlike a good scientist, maintains a stance of professional objectivity and neutrality, a requirement that is more easily met by restricting themselves to the choice of adequate means for reaching given ends while avoiding questions related to the choice of ends, as ends are not theirs to judge. An obvious objection is that not all the entire fields of professional activity are as close to empirical science. Hence, Evetts (2014) clarified that for a long time, the sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers and in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls of industrial and commercial organizations.

Moreover, Langer and Jiang (2007) reported that the increased emphasis on and calls for professionalism in the voluntary sector, charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is another complication and variation in professional practice. Whereas on the perception Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), there is wider accessibility to internet knowledge which renders the importance of professional and expert, tacit and experiential knowledge and expertise more open to challenge (Olofsson 2009; Verpraet 2009). Whereas, organizational principles, strategies and methods are deeply affecting most professional occupations and expert groups, transforming their identities, structures and practices. Since these are general perceptions of professional practice, there are others peculiarities to specific professions.

Perception of ethics in auditing profession in Nigeria was studied by Adeyemi and Fagbemi (2011). Findings from the study show that there is no significant difference in the perception of respondent groups on the need for auditors to abide by high ethical standard and

the need to shape the views of new entrants to the profession. However, respondents have different perception on the decline of core values which attracted them to the profession. The study also suggested that there is the need for the profession to gear its effort towards shaping the views of new entrants to the profession in Nigeria, ensure adherence and enforcement of high ethical standard.

General Recommendations for Entrenching Core Values in Librarianship

1. It is therefore recommended that all librarians in Nigeria who were not taught Information Ethics while in library schools should make every effort to get acquainted with the concept of Information Ethics through personal studies, conferences, and workshops as this will enhance the way they perceive information profession in changing society.
2. Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should work hard and team up with other African library schools and regulatory associations to ensure that Information Ethics is fully included as a course in the LIS curriculum. This will make librarians in Africa to be well equipped and be ready to confront any ethical issues that may arise in the course of professional activities.
3. Strict enforcement of ethical conducts among librarians should be intensified by Library management/Authority in every higher institution in Nigeria. This will instill ethical behaviour in librarians.

Conclusion

The study was designed to examine entrenching core values in librarianship in Nigeria. The study shows protection of personal data; choice of materials and censorship; privacy and confidentiality; social responsibility equal treatment of users; and intellectual freedom as core values of librarianship; lack of exposure to a course specifically on Information Ethics in most

Nigerian library; low level of enforcement of ethical conducts by library management; concern for self-survival at the expense of rule of law; and low awareness and promotion of professional code of ethics by professional associations as factors responsible for low practice of Information Ethics; and that ethical consideration by librarians in higher institutions will enhance their productivity and profession but when users are not ethically treated as expected, they can have negative picture of the library which can render the library underutilized.

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