

THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROGRAMME IN UNIVERSITY OF JOS: ITS DEVELOPMENT, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The paper discusses the establishment of Library and Information Science Programme in the University of Jos to fill a gap in the manpower needs of Plateau State and neighbouring States in the area of library and information provision. The paper recommends that to maximize the benefits associated with the Programme; the University Authorities need to consolidate on the progress made so far for the provision of adequate physical facilities, recruitment of staff, so as to enhance NUC accreditation.

Keywords: Library and information science, University of Jos, NUC accreditation

Historical Background

Library and Information Science Programme in the University of Jos, is an initiative of University Library, under the leadership of Professor A. Ochai who set up a four man Committee with Dr. S.A Akintunde as Chairman, while other members were: Dr. P.S. Nedosa and Mrs. A.V. Ajulo. The Secretary was Mr. G.G. Gupiyem. The Committee's mandate was to collect copies of prospectus of other universities by which it would be guided in drawing up a draft curriculum. This was done through visits to the University of Calabar, University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Bayero University Kano. The draft curriculum thus developed was submitted to the University Librarian, who forwarded it to the Senate Curriculum Committee for deliberation. Subsequent the draft curriculum was presented at Senate during its Fifth Regular Meeting for 2004/2005 Academic Session held in December 15, 2005 when the take-off of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) Programme on part-time received approval, to be ran by the University's Institute of Education.

The Programme took off in the 2006 Contact Session with 31 students, but was short-lived due

to technical observation made by Directorate of Academic Planning and Management, to the effect that the National universities Commission was yet to approve the Senate decision, and for National university commission was yet to approve the senate decision; moreover, the attention of Senate was drawn to an NUC requirement which stipulates that an academic programme in a university must first be functional on full-time basis before it commences operation on part-time basis. This observation led to the setting of a fresh Committee by Institute of Education under the leadership of professor, C.T.T. Akinmade on the 21st August, 2007, with the remaining membership made up of. Prof. C.A. Andzayi (Deputy Director Institute of Education), Mr. James Madugu, Mr. G.G. Gupiyem, Dr. Dokong (B.Ed. coordinator), and Secretary Institute of Education who served as the Secretary to the Committee. The Committee's mandate was to complete the NUC's application form in respect of the proposed programme. The University (through its Academic Planning Division) submitted the application forms for the proposed BLIS programme on 3rd January, 2008. NUC was ready for resources assessment by June 24, 2009

but the exercise had to be postponed due to absence of the required physical facilities, including departmental and staff offices and classrooms.

When Prof. C.A. Andzayi became the Dean of education, she had to order for the review of the programme from Part-Time to Full-Time, in line with the NUC requirement. The revised Programme was represented to Senate, at its 3rd Regular Meeting. During the Senate discussions, it was resolved that the University Library in conjunction with the Departments of Computer Science and Psychology, and the Faculty of Education where the Programme would be based, should articulate a curriculum unique from that of any other School of Library and Information Science in Nigeria. On that basis, the reviewed BLIS programme was approved as B.Sc Library and Information Science and not Bachelor of Library and information science (BLIS). The Programme was to be domiciled in Faculty of Education to develop into a full-fledged Department.

RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHING THE PROGRAMME IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

In most Nigerian Universities running library and information science programmes, the Department of Library and Information Science is domiciled in the Faculty of Education. This is understandably because libraries, being repositories of information and records of knowledge, are essentially veritable instruments of education. Library and Information Science Departments train professionals in the skills needed for documentation, retrieval and dissemination of knowledge, which the essential ingredient for transfer of knowledge. On the basis of these facts, and in line with the existing culture in the Universities, the Library and Information Science Programme in the University of Jos is domiciled in the Faculty of Education. Furthermore, in line with Senate's resolve to make the programme unique from any other such programme in other Nigerian Universities, the Library and Information Science Programme of the University of Jos is a four or three year BSc.

(Library and Information Science), and not a Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) Programme.

The Library and Information Science Programme was established in the University of Jos in response to the dearth of professionals with appropriate skills in the documentation, retrieval and dissemination of knowledge that has increasingly become nebulous, especially since the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly the Internet. It is strongly believed that public and private institutions in the country, especially those in the States surrounding and including Plateau State, will benefit most from the programme (Faculty of Education, Unijos, 2013).

Philosophy of the programme

The Bachelor of Library and information Science (BLIS) Degree Programme has become necessary because of the challenging global trend in harvesting, processing and dissemination of knowledge which has gone beyond the traditional practice of librarianship (Student Handbook, 2013). Modern librarianship, faced with a situation where information is becoming increasingly ambiguous, utilizes emerging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in approaching research theory and practice. Librarians and information scientist are still needed to gather, organize and plan for appropriate dissemination of knowledge, professional men and women need to be appropriately trained. Indeed, whether it is real-time, online or offline, digital or analogue, there is need for skilled human resources to identify specific needs of individuals and organizations, and appropriate technology, and also to package information in the best media and deliver the package in a timely manner to the target user.

The BLIS degree programme of University of Jos, therefore, seeks to transcend the traditional practice of librarianship and prepare graduates of the programme to creatively adapt to the changing nature of information, information gathering, processing, storage and effective dissemination. It is expected that the products or graduates of Library and Information Science

from University of Jos can work in all levels of education and other organizations.

General aims and objectives

Library and information science is a multi-disciplinary programme. Students find themselves in a multi-disciplinary situations; creating something new out of what often is an ill-defined situation. The programme seeks to provide deep approach to understanding the materials in an holistic fashion, versatile in the brining together to different ideas and to produce graduates who are creative, innovative and with good interpersonal relations in decision making and problem solving abilities.

The specific objectives of the programme as reflected in Andzayi (2007), Gupiyem (2010) and students Handbook (2013) are that at the end of the training, students will be able to:

1. Comprehend and apply effectively the basic theories and skills relating to the selection, acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, dissemination, use of information in Libraries and information centers.
2. Evaluate and use effectively technologies of information management, library automation, information retrieval and dissemination.
3. Acquire an understanding of the changing social, cultural and educational role of the library and the function of the information profession and contemporary society.
4. Acquire knowledge and skills to apply ICT to teaching, learning and research.
5. Develop an understanding of the importance of communication process and to foster the development of communication skills necessary for effective performance of the professional role.
6. Develop an understanding of the responsibilities and judgements required for their effective performance as information professionals
7. Manage financial and human resources adequately, in any organization they find themselves.

8. Design information systems that can anticipate and respond to the socio-economic, political, technological and cultural changes in the society.

Resource Verification and Take-off

A Mock Resource Verification Exercise was conducted by Faculty of Education on the 24th March 2012, in response to a memo from Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics) (Ugwu, 2012). The exercise was consistent with the NUC's requirements for resource verification visits to unapproved academic programmes in Nigerian Universities. The requirements centred on the following: introduction which should provide background information on the programme; name and nomenclature of the programme; where it is domiciled and commencement date; philosophy of the proposed programme should be clearly stated in statement that articulates the thoughts and motives for the establishment of the programme; aims and objectives of the programme should be clearly stated; rationale/justifications for establishing the programme. The other guidelines are in the areas of admission requirements; course content or curriculum development for the programme; the number of staff by qualification and rank, available library facilities; student graduation requirements in terms of the minimum cumulative grade points average (CGPA) and credit units that must be earned should be explained. Finally, in the areas of students enrolment, the number of enrolled students should be provided and this should be in compliance with the appropriate teacher-students ratio (TSR); funding sources should be provided in detail, meeting with the academic staff of the proposed programme; and inspection of physical facilities (NUC, n.d, NUC 2007; Nwafo, 2009).

The Mock Resource Verification paved way for the real NUC Resource verification that was conducted under the Chairmanship of Professor I.I. Ekoja, University Librarian of the University of Abuja. The NUC Resource Verification Team made recommendations for the take- off of the Programme. Based on those recommendations, the University of Jos applied to the NUC and

JAMB for the commencement of the Programme, and approval was secured with effect from November 2012. The pioneer students admitted into the Programme through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), and consisted of sixty students. The admission requirements stipulating at least five credits at O'level WAEC or NECO examination, including English, and with at least a pass in Mathematics was strictly followed.

Development of the Programme

Fewer than fifteen candidates applied for admission into the Programme through the UTME in 2013, while there were hundreds of candidates seeking admission through Direct Entry (DE). Twenty-two DE students were admitted, while 27 candidates were admitted through the UTME and the University's Remedial Programme for the 2013/2014 academic session. From all indications, the prospects for the Library and Information Science programme in the University are very bright. There is need for publicity, to create awareness about the existence of the programme, and the job opportunities available for the graduates.

For the administration of the Unit, Dr. G.G gupiyem served as Unit Coordinator and 100 level Coordinator at the take-off of the programme in the 2012/2013 session. In the second year (2013/2014 academic session), Dr. GUPIYEM was the 200 level coordinator, while Dr. Victoria Lawal was the Coordinator for 100 level. In April, 2014, Dr. Lily Ezeala was employed as a permanent lecturer for the Programme. She has since resumed duty. In 2014/2015 academic session, the level Coordinators were Dr. G.G Gupiyem, Dr. Vicky Lawal and Dr. Lily O. Ezeala for 300, 200 and 100 levels respectively. Professor A Ochai former University Librarian transferred his service to the Unit in January, 2015, after his sabbatical leave.

Relationship with the Department of Social Science Education and the University Library

The office of the Unit Coordinator for Library and Information Science, serves as the bridge linking the Department of Social Science

Education and the University Library. Lecturers for the course in the Unit are experienced librarians in the University Library. The Unit Coordinator reports the needs for the programme to both the Head of Department of Social Science Education and the University Librarian. The Unit Coordinator doubles as a full time staff of the Department of Social Science Education and the University Library. He is accountable to the Head of Department of Social Education on all academic and administrative responsibilities of the Unit. He is also accountable to the University Librarian on all issues related to Library and Information Science Programme and the University Library intervenes where necessary. This tripartite working relationship has been effective and useful.

Prospects of the Programme

The curriculum developed for Library and Information Science Programme in the University of Jos is unique from Library and Information Science curricula of other Universities in Nigeria.

The course contents expose students to both theory and practicals, at all levels. The students are exposed to both traditional librarianship and information and communication technology skills. The programme can be upgraded to a full department in the near future, if at least seven permanent lecturers are employed for it. Postgraduate programme is likely to start in the next five years, if more Ph.D lecturers are available.

The Challenges

Most of the challenges of the programme are either administrative in nature or due to communication gap. The challenges are summarized as follows:-

1. Wrong placement of the Programme in Faculty of the Natural Science at its take off. This delayed the registration of the first intake, especially those with pass in Mathematics.
2. When this problem of wrong placement was administratively addressed, by domiciling it in Faculty of Education, it was again unfortunately placed in the Department of Science and Technology,

which is still not appropriate for it. This situation has since been properly addressed by domiciling it in the Department of Social Science Education.

3. Wrong nomenclature of the programme is another challenge. The Programme is named e.g. B.SC Library and information and B.Ed Library and information Science, these were contained in the memorandum from NUC dated 23rd August 2011, and memo from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) to the Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Faculty of Education University of Jos University of Jos dated 7th March, 2012. Efforts towards addressing these anomalies are ongoing.
4. The Programme is often omitted in Central time-table of the Faculty of Education. This has been serious challenge especially.
5. There is no specific accommodation to serve as lecture halls or classrooms mainly dedicated for the Programme.
6. The fire incident in the University Library (Main Library) sometimes in 2012 was a big set-back to the Programme, because two computer laboratories inspected during NUC Resource Verification for the Programme were among the facilities destroyed by the fire incident.

Recommendations

The University Administration should apply to the NUC, and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for correction of the nomenclature of the degree of the programme from Bachelor of Science (BSc.) to Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS).

1. The Faculty of Education Central Time-Table Committee should always address issues of omitted programme in the time-table promptly. These will smooth the flow of teaching activities during the semester.
2. Faculty of Education and Department of Physical Facilities of the University need to cooperate more closely in addressing problems associated with space inadequacies bedeviling the new

programme.

3. The university's computer laboratories should be urgently restored, in view of their critical value to the BLIS Programme.
4. The University should prioritize the upgrading of the Unit under which the BLIS Programme is currently run to a full-fledged Department, in order to realize the full impact of the Programme. This includes the urgent recruitment of staff and provision of adequate physical facilities which will enhance NUC accreditation.

Conclusion

The Library and Information Science Programme in the University of Jos was created to fill a gap in the manpower needs of Plateau State and neighbouring States in the area of library and information provision. The prospect for it is bright. In order to maximize the benefits associated with Programme, the University Authorities need to consolidate on the progress made so far provision of adequate physical facilities, recruitment of staff, so as to enhance NUC accreditation.

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