



Article title: Attracting Grade "A" Students in Library and Information Science in Nigeria

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Attracting the grade “A” Students to Library and Information science in Nigeria

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Introduction

It is generally observed that in modern economy, the importance of information has continued to increase and it calls for better use of existing services and continuous improvement of information services to meet explicit and implicit needs of the society. Education and training in library and information science, as a matter of policy must therefore take cognizance of the complexities in the contemporary public and private organizations and institutions as direct response to their changing information needs. Library and information professionals are needed not only to gather, organize and coordinate access and use of the best and rich available information resources of organizations and the society, but also to package, repackage and market them to ensure their effective access and utilization by the target audience.

A critical analysis of the developments of LIS schools in Nigeria vis-à-vis the overall objectives of providing opportunities for manpower development of library and information personnel in the country, it could be said that prospective candidates for admission into the Nigeria LIS schools have places of choice to go for their professional education and training (Mohammed, 2008). However, their final decision on which LIS school they would prefer to attend will hinge on the type of programme available, the admission requirements for the available programme, their overall interest in the respective programmes, the job opportunities associated with the programmes and the extent to which their academic credentials actually met the admission requirements for the desired programme. Although the regulating bodies of tertiary institutions in

Nigeria such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) have set up minimum admission requirements, for the approved programmes in such institutions, there could be some internal variations acceptable to the respective institutions in order to satisfy the philosophy establishing the programmes of study (Mohammed, 2008). What is however crucial is the ability of the programmes to attract high quality candidates for admission and the ability of their products to acquire the necessary education, training, skills and other competencies expected of them by the employers of labour. The basic question therefore is: what strategies can the LIS schools in Nigeria adopt in order to attract high quality candidates for admission into their respective programmes?

LIS schools in Nigeria are today situated in serious competitive environments characterized by challenges which they must cope with in order to survive, advance and become more relevant in the scheme of things (Mohammed, 2008). The extent to which they are willing and able to overcome these challenges will go a long way in determining the extent to which they can attract quality candidates for admission into their programmes.

1. It is generally expected that programmes offered in LIS schools and in any other departments of an educational institution should prepare the products to be competent enough to cope with the expectations of prospective employers of labour and also be self-reliant when the need arises Ashby cited in Mohammed (2008). Some of the competencies expected of a library and information professional in the information/digital age include:

- expertise in knowledge management;
- mastery of ICT/multi-media applications in data/information management, transfer and delivery;
- good knowledge of management theories and practices;

- information brokerage, and advocacy; etc

To Karisiddappa (2004), these professional competencies point to the need for LIS schools to continually review their LIS curriculum to fit the contemporary age expectations. This should be in addition to the upgrading of their teaching, learning and research resources/facilities to enhance the theoretical and practical competence of their products. It is natural that employers of labour would prefer to hire individuals who would add value to their organizations. This expectation is even more pertinent for the library and information professionals in this digital era where ICTs have come to bear in all facets of library and information work as organizations are gradually becoming knowledge based so as to maintain a niche over others in the global economy (Nnaji, 1986). Certainly, preference will be given to the library and information professionals who have the knowledge, skills and experience in information management, information resources management; information delivery for enhanced creativity and innovations, expertise in the exploration and exploitation of ICTs potentials and who are indeed professionals in the practical sense of it. In Nigeria, holders of bachelor's degree in any subject field with third class or pass grade are rarely employed in Federal Government establishments. Where there is no option, they are usually stepped down by one level in their employment cadre.

There is now an upsurge of applications for admission into postgraduate programmes in the Universities in Nigeria. This has been necessitated by an increasing rate of unemployment, employers' lack of confidence in the ability and competence of an appreciable number of graduates and the introduction of terminal point of advancement in work places by type of academic/professional qualifications (Sharr, 1963). This scenario points to the fact that it is those products or professionals with practical knowledge, skills, experiences and competence, who would be most preferred by the employers of labour. In effect therefore, prospective candidates

applying for admission into university programmes and indeed into other educational institutions would prefer to apply for admission into reputable and recognized institutions and programmes where they would acquire the requisite competences necessary to ensure better prospect for employment and advancement.

General strategies to addressing the aforementioned challenges

According to UNESCO (2004), the following general strategies could be used to attract quality candidates in the LIS schools

1. Enhance the curriculum: Library and information schools must ensure that their curriculum is up-to-date and covers various areas of the field. This will attract students who are seeking quality education and comprehensive knowledge in library and information science.
2. Offer practical experiences: Students are more likely to be attracted to a library and information school that offers practical experiences, such as internships, fieldwork, and hands-on projects. These opportunities allow students to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations.
3. Provide scholarships and financial aid: Offering scholarships and financial aid can attract high-quality students who may not have the financial means to pursue their education otherwise. This strategy will help increase the diversity and talent pool of students in library and information schools.
4. Collaborate with industry professionals: Library and information schools should establish collaborations with industry professionals, libraries, and information centers. This can include guest lectures, workshops, and mentorship programs. Such collaborations create networking opportunities for students and demonstrate the school's commitment to connecting students with professionals in the field.

5. Foster a supportive and inclusive environment: Creating a supportive and inclusive environment is crucial for attracting quality students. Library and information schools should promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, and ensure that students feel valued and supported throughout their education.

6. Publicize success stories: Highlighting the achievements of current and past students can attract quality students. Publishing success stories, showcasing projects, and highlighting career pathways can provide potential students with inspiration and motivation to choose a library and information school.

7. Engage in marketing and outreach: Library and information schools need to actively engage in marketing and outreach activities. This can include participating in education fairs, conferences, and open house sessions. Additionally, social media platforms and targeted advertisements can be used to reach potential students.

8. Foster partnerships with libraries and information centers: Library and information schools should forge partnerships with libraries and information centers, both within Nigeria and internationally. These partnerships can provide research opportunities, access to resources, and potential employment options for students after graduation.

9. Continuously improve teaching methods: Library and information schools should be open to exploring innovative teaching methods, such as flipped classrooms, online courses, or blended learning. Embracing modern teaching techniques can attract students who are looking for a flexible and engaging learning experience.

10. Maintain alumni relations: Library and information schools should strive to maintain strong alumni relations by organizing events, networking opportunities, and career development

programs. Alumni can serve as mentors and advocates for the school and can contribute to attracting quality students through their own experiences and success stories.

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