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Academic library functions and its structural development in Nigeria

(Funkcje i struktura bibliotek akademickich w Nigerii)

The primary traditional functions of a University are teaching, research, public services and conservation of knowledge and ideas [6]. Having listed these traditional functions, Ifidon explained in details, the six functions of the University and the supportive roles of the Library in achieving these. They are:

1. **Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge** – Knowledge already exist. It is universal. The University exists to probe for more knowledge, promote it and transfer it.
2. **Research** – Knowledge must not the static. New grounds have to be broken. There must be improvement on what already exists. This is where the University comes in i.e, to promote research. The research must be need-driven.
3. **Provision of intellectual leadership** – The University is also in a position to supply the nations think tank group. The political class, the social class and the economic class must always look forward to the University for advice.
4. **Manpower development** – The University must strive to produce the manpower needs of a nation. It must produce teachers, agricultural extension workers, medical practitioners, legal personnel, engineers and even in security.
5. **Promoting social and economic modernization** – Africa has one of the highest illiteracy levels world wide. This has in turn caused a great deal of ignorance in the people. Even leaders are not spared. Ignorance has caused a lot of diseases, fears, poverty and unemployment. The University, through public enlightenment can change this situation.
6. **Promoting Inter-continental unity and international understanding** – The University encourages a great deal of

exchange programmes among students and the faculty. This development brings about cross fertilization of ideas. Geographical and political barriers are removed and the world becomes a small village.

With the background idea of what the University is out to achieve it is now convenient to state the supportive roles played by the Library towards the achievement of the set educational goals. Again Ifidon [6] listed these as:

1. Provision of materials in support of the learning processes. Materials for course work, term papers, projects and others.
2. Provision of materials in support of research and advanced study to meet the requirement of the teachers, postgraduate students and researchers.
3. Assisting the Library users in his own personal self development especially in materials for self reading.
4. Cooperation with other University Libraries with a view to developing a network of library resources which are at the disposal of staff and students.
5. Serving the specialized information needs of the region within which the University is located. Materials on culture, economics, history, politics and sociology are relevant under this context.

An organisation structure is a way of describing the relationship among groups and individuals in an organisation. In an organisational structure, two things comes to mind. Roles/responsibilities and communication/accountability. Roles refer to what a person or group does and accountability involves the relationship that a person or group needs to hold in order to perform their jobs (http://www.libsuccess.organisationalstructure) [10].

The nature of the services rendered by a library determines the status of that library. The more and varied the services are, the more the library can be assumed to be developed. Size does not determine how developed a library is, but how effective the facilities are put into use and how prepared the staff are to render specialised services [1]. ACRL [2] stated that the library should establish, promote, maintain and evaluate a range of quality services that support the college's mission and goals.

Oladokun and Fidzani [9] in their study on Colleges of Education libraries in Botswana listed orientation, bibliographic instruction, reference, reprographic, CD-ROM search, reserve collection, issue and return, current awareness and inter library loans as some of the services rendered by an academic library. Similar to these, Edoka [4] added

other services such as acquisition, Selective Dissemination of Information, (SDI) Indexing and Abstracting, Translation.

No doubt, everybody will agree with me that even with the few services listed above, which is inexhaustive, these cannot be rendered by one or two persons, no matter how versatile, hence the need for divisions.

Organisational structure of a library tends to be relatively complex because it reflects a mixture of technologies. Technical services resemble continuous process manufacturing, circulation and shelving are routine-service activities and reference work is a professional service activity [3].

Apart from the complex nature of the services, God also supported it according to the biblical account of Moses and Jethro his father in-law in judging the Israelites [5]. Msuya [8] identified four reasons why structuring is desirable. These includes:
1. students increasing population,
2. organisation of library according to broad subject area,
3. introduction of ICT and
4. size of the Library.

With divisions, services are broken into manageable sizes and people have ample opportunities to serve.

Above all, a particular library will conform with the practices elsewhere. Kumar [7] too was of the opinion that as the Library grows, there is the need for division of duties and activities.

Msuya [8] in his research came up with the following facts that:
1. Structuring brings services closer to the users and save their time.
2. It creates a sense of belonging and commitment to a specific part of the library. Users identify with particular staff.
3. Improvement in the relationship between library staff and users because interaction improves.
4. Sense of responsibility and accountability is created among staff. Sections are fully responsible and accountable for whatever happens within a Unit.

The Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) library came into being when the University was established in 1982 whereas, The University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established in 1962. As normal with any new library, collections at FUTA was small and staff were just three. In such a library then, much was not be expected and the roles then was just processing the few books available and circulating them. The University Librarian then was part of the process, may be as the Circulation Librarian and Chief Cataloguer. The story at Nsukka was likely to be strictly the same as that of FUTA. As at December 2008,

the library carried out its routines under six majors divisions and ten units namely:

1. Administration
2. Readers Services
3. Technical Services
4. Collection Development
5. Schools/Faculties Libraries and
6. ICT.

Under these Divisions were:

- Circulation unit
- Reference unit
- Security unit
- Bindery unit
- Cataloguing and Classification unit
- Serials unit
- Audio-Visuals unit
- Automation, Database and maintenance unit
- Acquisitions unit
- Bibliographic Research and Documents unit and
- Schools Libraries unit

It is to be noted therefore that grouping of units under various divisions are a matter of convenience. Nothing compels a librarian to put a particular unit under a division. However, the calibre of available staff, quality and quantity determines which division/unit he should head and who should direct who.

To support my argument, I have tried to examine the organogram of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Library as uploaded in that institution's website, there are nine (9) divisions and thirty-one (31) units as against FUTA's six (6) divisions and eleven (11) units, I need to emphasise here that there was no conference or workshop where the two university libraries were asked to adopt these mode of operations. The variables listed above informed them of what to do.

A major lesson to be learnt here is that introducing changes is not something that is easily accepted by all staff [8]. Staff already had their own ways of doing things which they were used to. Introducing changes to them may mean subjecting them to learning process and placing them in a world of uncertainty and the unknown. Change is not only desirable but mandatory. How to manage and direct change and internalise continuous change into the culture of the academic staff is a challenge faced today by library administrators and managers. For effective change, everybody must be involved.

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