

OPPORTUNITIES IN LIBRARIANSHIP: ALTERNATIVES FOR THE GHANAIAN GRADUATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the options available to the Library school graduates in Ghana, examine the constraints that militate against their full exploitation, and make suggestions towards the utilization of these alternative opportunities. The paper therefore attempts to show what else the graduate of the Library School can do with his or her certificate, in the light of job opportunities in the country.

INTRODUCTION

The multi-disciplinary nature of our discipline and the training of professionals for information work is expected to create multiple opportunities. But this assertion is yet to be fully exploited in a country whose citizens hardly know what type of information is best for them, how and where to obtain such information. It is rather a paradox that even though the importance of information as a national resource tends to increase, the role of libraries is decreasing in importance. This is because of the fact that the role of libraries and other information centres is hardly recognised in the country. But the question to be asked here is, how do we as members of the Library profession get these anomalies corrected in the country? It is my contention that part of this problem will be solved with

the improvement of the education and training giving to the graduates of our library school. An evaluation of the capabilities of the graduate in providing information services should be the basic criteria.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR INFORMATION WORK IN GHANA

As at present, the quality and training for Librarianship and information work in Ghana needs some improvement. This will avoid confusion about who does professional duties and who does not. To the average library user even in academic settings, every employee in the library is a librarian, be he a library attendant, a library assistant or a professionally trained librarian. This distinction needs to be established, with the introduction of clear-cut separate courses

and training facilities for each category.

Another area with regards to education and training is the introduction of more courses in the Library school in response to the demands of modern information requirements. In countries such as United States and Britain, non-traditional Library science courses abound. These courses include Publishing, Automation, Operations Research, Introduction to Communications, Organisation and Administration of various types of libraries, and specialization in subject bibliographies. Getting closer home, one can find some of these courses in the curriculum of some of the Library schools in Nigeria.^{1,2} However, these courses are yet to be found in the curriculum of our Library school.³

While the introduction of these course were in response to new demands of the information profession, they have also come to offer a wider range of opportunities for the graduates of such programmes.

ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A wide range of alternative opportunities exist for the Library school graduate in the country. It should however be made clear that the writer is not speculating that there is a bleak future for the graduates

of the library school in finding jobs in the libraries. This is only a suggestion for the re-examination and re-evaluation of the potentials that exist in other information related areas. It is not an advocacy to dissociate ourselves from libraries as institutions which I strongly believe we will continue to patronise. Rather, the current realities of life demands the exploration of what other things the library school graduate can do.

One option which librarians in Ghana have neglected is the possibility of taking up careers in the publishing industry. Even though the publishing industry is still largely undeveloped in this country, trained information professionals such as librarians have great potentials in working in these houses. It could even be argued that the low development of the industry in the country is the result of lack of adequately trained professionals who can locate manuscripts, organise, distribute and market the publications. "Some of the editorial, abstracting and indexing services can be provided by a trained librarian."⁴ Courses like Book Production, Publishing and the Book Trade *should be able to* prepare the librarian for these jobs.

Related to the above alternative is the Book-selling business. A look around the country shows a large number of unorganised bookshops. Working with personnel that lack

basic training in the community analysis and the literature and bibliography of various aspects of knowledge, a large proportion of our bookshops are stocked with outdated and irrelevant information resources. They scarcely satisfy the information needs of their communities. The situation is analogous to an acquisition librarian who builds his collections with little or no regard to community analysis and later finds that the collection is hardly used by the clientele. The librarian, equipped with the knowledge of the literature and bibliography of fields such as the Social Sciences, the Humanities, Law, Science and Technology will therefore be of immense value in a book-selling business.

Librarians by nature of our training, can act as Consultants in the area of locating, processing and the dissemination of information. With his knowledge and experience in Library Planning and Administration, a library consultant can help in planning new library buildings, selection and acquisition of materials and even conducting interviews for major personnel appointments. However, the services of these consultants are yet to be fully exploited in Ghana. The situation might explain their virtual absence in the information field in the country.

Librarians in the country may also decide to take on the responsibilities for the archives in their

various places work. In this light, it is pertinent to note that the library school in Ghana is the only one in English-speaking West Africa that provides combined courses in Librarianship and Archival Studies.⁵ This is a unique achievement which should help the graduates, as both jobs require many of the same competencies. They both involve the acquisition, organisation and use of materials. The librarian through experience and further training, may even choose to become an archivist.⁶

A comparatively new development is the possibility of Library School graduates becoming Free-lance librarians. This could be done either by individuals working alone, or a number of librarians forming companies. They are able to use their skills to verify citations for writers, check references and notes for researchers, and generally finding and organising information for their clients. Free-lancing unlike consultancy services, can be conducted on part-time or full-time basis. It must be emphasised however, that in both cases, services of experienced librarians are required. These are jobs which librarians often practice "when they retire from full-time work".⁷

As in the case of consultants, there are very few Free-lance librarians in Ghana. Meanwhile, we have medical doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects and engineers who

sell their specialised services to their customers for fees. Why then can't Librarians, with their specialized training, also organise themselves in a similar manner to sell their services which also provide a source of employment?

IMPLICATIONS

There are a few questions one may ask here. Firstly, is it not a negation of the basic principles of free provision of information resources for librarians to charge for their services? Secondly, have the Ghanaian librarians the qualifications and competencies to take up such jobs? To the first question, I will say that the provision of information resources has never actually been free in any country. Somebody has always paid for such services. The answer to the second question is not far fetched. It lies in the revision of the curriculum of our Library school in order to equip the graduates with various specialisations needed for these jobs. It is important to point out that librarians should not be oriented in their training with a narrow minded perspective as if libraries are the only places they can work in. Libraries are not the only information based organisations. As pointed out by Taylor, "to educate librarians to think only in terms of a place called the library as we currently know that institution, is to do them a dis-

service and probably doom them to ineffectuality".⁸ Library education in Ghana therefore needs a major restructuring in terms of these issues if the great opportunities explored in this paper are to be realised. The present structure lacks the basic fundamental skills with which the graduate of our library school can work effectively in non-traditional library settings.

SUGGESTIONS

It is the view of this writer that there is an urgent need for Librarians to convince the society of the importance of what they do. To achieve this, they will have to market their services outside the library institution.

As has earlier been stated, emphasis in the training of our graduates should gradually shift from traditional courses to modern courses that will make our graduates more marketable. The role of our Library school graduates should be seen more as that of "information professional" with a variety of skills, rather than the narrow concept of "librarian" which invariably tend to restrict their potentials to the library institution.

To acquire the necessary training in modern information handling techniques, a number of facilities ranging from simple audio-visual materials to computerised data bases must be provided. A look at

the facilities of the Library school show a glaring lack of these facilities. Enough funds should therefore be made available for these equipments.

Adequate provision should also be made for the continuing education of our library educators. They have to be encouraged to acquire the necessary training, and to update their knowledge so as to be able to adequately train the students. The Department of Library and Archival Studies in conjunction with the Library Association must seek external avenues for sponsorship of these teachers, since Government scholarships are almost impossible to obtain these days.

The trend whereby various governments accord libraries and librarianship low priority does not augur well for quality education. The end result will be the continued information poverty of a majority of Ghanaians due to shortage of information workers and the lack of adequate bibliographic control mechanisms.

The issues raised in the papers also border on the idea of Information Policy for the country. As at present, Ghana like some other developing countries does not have any documents which can be referred to as her information policy. The Government of Ghana should be constantly made aware of the importance of a meaningful information policy.

CONCLUSION

A survey of the employment placements of the graduates of the library school since its inception in 1965 shows that a very minute percentage are engaged in jobs outside the Library institutions. It is the view of this paper that this parochial orientation must change. This implies that the Library science student must be trained in such a way that he can work in a variety of organisations dealing with the procession and dissemination of information.

The view that Library schools train librarians who can work only in libraries has become anachronistic. They should be able to explore other opportunities outside the library.⁹ Until these potentials of the librarian are recognised, adequate instructional and research facilities provided and various constraints are removed, graduates of our library school will continue to hang around the corridors of only those who hold the library employment power. The potentialities in education for information work cannot be fully realised unless our library school is able to produce professionals who are computer literate, who are knowledgeable in communication skills, and who can apply scientific management principles to the management of information.

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