

# **CAREER EXPERIENCE OF PAST STUDENTS WHO ENROLLED FOR THE BACHELOR OF LIBRARY SCIENCE OF AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY – ZARIA, NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the career experience of past students who enrolled for the Bachelor of Library Science of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated academic qualification of past students before entering library school, reason(s) for reading Bachelor of Library Science, type of libraries graduates are employed and the extent to which graduates can work comfortably in various units of the library.

Data relating to the experience of past students were gathered through the use of an inquiry form. Discussions were held with some of the respondents. A total of 189 useable forms were received, representing 68.5 percent of all the past students.

More than half of the respondents entered the programme with General Certificate of Education (Equivalent of United States high school diploma). The major reasons for reading library science are “interested in librarianship” and “to improve self” 63.5 and 60.3 percent respectively. More than half of the respondents are employed in library.

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The majority of the respondents can work comfortably in almost all sections of the library.

Suggestions were made on how to improve the quality of library education.

Until recently, the opportunity for the trained Librarians in Nigeria have not been many and better aspects of Library service remained either ignored or unappreciated. Happily, there seems to have been changes in recent years. Political changes following Nigeria independence in 1960, the oil boom in 1970s and the greater number of personnel exchanges between Nigeria and the West have helped to bring about a climate of opinion distinctively favourable to Library Education.

Before 1960, professional training for Librarianship was usually obtained through the prevailing British pattern of pre-professional recruitment, followed by in-service study for the examinations of the British Library Association leading to the Associationship (A.L.A) qualification. The first authoritative voice on the issue of training came from the UNESCO Seminar on the development of Public Libraries in Africa held at Ibadan, Nigeria in 1953. It recommended that high level training of professional Librarians be conducted for Africans in Africa. This implies that curriculum can be adopted to the African situation and that students are trained in conditions in which they will work.<sup>1</sup>

In 1957 the Carnegie Corporation of New York sponsored an American Librarian, Harold Lancour, to study the libraries in British West Africa. In his report, Lancour recommended the establishment of a library school connected with a university level institution, that it be at the post graduate level and that

University College, Ibadan, was the most likely institution to house it. The Carnegie Corporation accordingly accepted the report, approved Ibadan and approached the University College authorities with a grant of \$88,000 to be spread over a period of five years for the operation of the school. The early courses of the Institute led to the registration examination of the British Library Association. In 1962/63 a new syllabus for the University of Ibadan Diploma was introduced. From 1966/67 academic session, the University ceased to admit non-graduates to its Diploma course<sup>2</sup> and concentrated on post graduate education for Librarians. Presently, Ibadan Library School is a Department in the Faculty of Education. It offers four programmes – Diploma undergraduate, Master of Library Studies, Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy<sup>3</sup>

The need for a second Library School had been advocated as early as 1963 by F.A. Sharr, in his survey of Libraries in what was then Northern Nigeria. In his report, Sharr recommended a School of Librarianship at Ahmadu Bello University and that the course should comprise both general education up to University entrance and professional studies.<sup>4</sup> In May, 1967 the Nigerian Universities Commission gave its approval for the Department of Librarianship at Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria. In 1968/69 academic session, the Department started with two programmes – Diploma undergraduate and Bachelor of Library Science. At present the Department has 25 full time Lecturers and Offers the following programmes:

1. A two academic years undergraduate diploma in Librarianship. The programme is designed for para-professional. To be admitted, a candidate must have passed in five subjects in the General Certificate of Education (an equivalent of United States High School Diploma).
2. A three year Bachelor of Library Science in Librarianship (Undergraduate). To be admitted, a candidate must either:

- (a) have a General Certificate of Education passed in five different subjects of which at least two must be at 'Advanced' level or
  - (b) have passed the Nigerian Certificate of Education (A three year post-secondary education programme designed to train middle level teachers).
  - (c) have passed the Diploma in Library Science of Ahmadu Bello University (or its equivalent) and have at least a year post qualification library work experience.
3. A master of Library Science which is open to:
- (a) graduates who wish to enter librarianship at the full professional level and also prepare themselves for research in librarianship and related discipline;
  - (b) graduates who already possesses a recognised professional qualification in librarianship and wish to up-date their knowledge or wish to specialise in an area of librarianship.
4. A doctoral programme which is designed to train library and information science educators, researchers and director of Libraries.

The establishment of a Bachelor of Library Science programme generated a lot of controversy among Nigerian libraries. There was a division of opinion between those who saw the future of professional education linked closely with the universities, with tuition at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Some librarians were of the opinion that only the holders of a good first degree in an academic discipline should be considered for admission to library schools<sup>6</sup>. A colleague sums up the feeling of this school of thought as follows:

“Undergraduate programmes leading to Bachelor of Library Science degree as obtained in Ahmadu Bello University

has very little to recommend it and should be discouraged<sup>7</sup>.”

On the other hand, the advocates of Bachelor of Library Science programme justified it on the need to train many librarians urgently needed to meet the country's demand.

“If more Nigerian librarians are to be produced, the most concrete and practical proposal that appears relevant at this stage is to improve the first degree course, the type of which is offered by the Ahmadu Bello University<sup>8</sup>.”

In the opinion of the writer, the higher the entry qualification of any profession, the more effective or respectable the profession. On the other hand, education for librarianship is not an independent variable, for it cannot remain detached from the happenings in the society and in other professions. In Nigeria, professions like law, engineering, accountancy etc are currently trained at the Bachelor's level. Of necessity, it seems, it is more realistic to establish library science programme at undergraduate level. When more graduates from all disciplines are prepared to make career in librarianship, the undergraduate library science programmes will die a natural death<sup>9</sup>. Hence, the need to make the programmes flexible and readily adaptable to change.

In the past five years undergraduate programmes in library science have been established at the universities of Kano, Maiduguri, Ekiti, Benin and Nsukka. From all indications it appears likely that more library schools would be established to meet the growing demands of librarians in Nigeria. While this expansion is happy augury for the future of the library profession in Nigeria, it does not in itself assure either improved library service or satisfactory education. The multiplication of the number of institutions offering library science programmes because of the great demand does not guarantee good library education. For sound expansion, it seems imperative to re-evaluate the existing programmes and determine if their objectives are commensurable

with the needs of the library profession and if these programmes really fulfill their objectives. One way of doing this is by asking past students on their experience since after graduation. The purpose of this study is to examine the career experience of past students who enrolled for the Bachelor of Library Science of Ahmadu Bello University Nigeria. Specifically, the study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the academic qualification of past students before entering library school?
2. What is the reason(s) for reading Bachelor of Library Science?
3. In what type of libraries are the graduates of Bachelor of Library Science employed?
4. To what extent can the graduates of Bachelor of Library Science work comfortably in various units of the Library?

### Review of Literature

No meeting of Nigeria's librarians since the first assembly in 1953<sup>10</sup> has failed to concern itself with the library education. In spite of this interest, very few studies have been conducted on graduates of library schools in Nigeria. Nzotta examined the characteristics of post-graduate class of 1977 at the University of Ibadan<sup>11</sup> and the choice of librarianship as a career in the same university<sup>12</sup>. Ogunshye<sup>13</sup> discussed and analysed the number of students graduated in the same library school. On the other hand, Mohammed and Afolabi<sup>14</sup> examined student enrollments and number graduated during the first few years of the establishment of library science programme in Ahmadu Bello University. Olden<sup>15</sup> gave a good historical development of the same library schools. As useful as those studies were, they left out the most important element of any programme – the experience of past students since they have graduated from the library school programme.

Study such as this could have a number of applications. First

of all, it will provide contribution to education for librarianship by revealing needed modifications in the light of past students experience. The information obtained will be useful to teachers in library schools in gaining better understanding of their students. Finally, it will provide the basic and types of continuing education needs of practising librarians.

### **Procedure**

In order to assess the career experience of past students of Bachelor of Library Science degree programme of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, a questionnaire was designed, tested, revised and sent to all the 276 students that graduated from the programme between 1971 and 1980 (the first ten years of the programme). The questionnaire mailed was logical and at the same time was designed with the intent of sustaining the respondent's interest. The wording, especially the headings, was deliberately made personal. The covering letter attached to each questionnaire identified the project director. It also explained the benefits of the study to the individual respondent and to the profession as a whole. It assured the anonymity of the replies and a self addressed stamped envelope was enclosed. A few questionnaire failed to reach their intended recipients because many of the addresses were out of date. In cases where current addresses were unknown, inquiry forms were sent to the permanent home addresses.

Of the 276 inquiry forms sent, 189 usable forms were received, a response of 68.5 percent. This is a very good response in developing country such as Nigeria, where postal communication is poor and unreliable. In addition because of rapid economic expansion many professionals (including librarians) change their jobs frequently.

### **Results and Comments**

## Academic Qualification before Library School

Library work experience before entering library school gives the student to discover whether he is really suited to his choice of profession. For many practical operations, a short period of doing is better than many hours of description. Like all the other library schools in the country, Ahmadu Bello University library school accepts students without library experience. The fact of the matter is that until recently, recruitment of students has presented some difficulties even without library work experience as a requirement. Libraries are few, in addition, librarianship as a profession is new in Nigeria and has less prestige when compared to older professions such as Law and Medicine. Fortunately, in the last four or five years, almost, all the library schools receive more applications than they can cope with.

Table I

### Academic Qualifications Before Entering B.L.S. Programme

| Qualifications<br>Before Entering<br>B.L.S. Programme | Academic<br>Library<br>N=96 |             | Special<br>Library<br>N=60 |             | Public<br>Library<br>N=31 |             | Total<br>N = 189 |            |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------|
|   | No                          | %           | No                         | %           | No                        | %           | No               | %          |
|   | G.C.E. 'A' Level of<br>IJMB | 53          | 28.0                       | 40          | 21.2                      | 8           | 4.2              | 101        |
| Nigerian Certificate in<br>Education (N.C.E)          | 28                          | 14.8        | 13                         | 9.6         | 16                        | 8.5         | 57               | 30.2       |
| Diploma in Library<br>Science                         | 15                          | 7.9         | 7                          | 3.7         | 9                         | 4.8         | 31               | 16.4       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>96</b>                   | <b>50.8</b> | <b>60</b>                  | <b>31.7</b> | <b>33</b>                 | <b>17.7</b> | <b>189</b>       | <b>100</b> |



It is interesting to note that more than half (53.4%) of the respondents entered the programme directly from high school with General Certificate of Education at 'Advanced Level'. The result is expected because until recently it was the only recognised qualification into the Bachelor of Library Science programme. It is very surprising to note the large number of holders Certificate in Education. The reason for this may be due to the fact that Librarians conditions are better than teachers. Teachers lots are very poor in Nigeria, it has happened in many States in Nigeria, where teachers were not paid their salaries for as many as six months.

It is interesting to note that few diploma in Library Science holders are in the study (16.4%). This is because initially, only very best diploma holders were admitted into Bachelor's programme. It is rather unfortunate that in the past four or five years the bulk of the intake into the Bachelor's programme have been holders of diploma in Library Science.

In the opinion of the writer, the best among diploma holders should be encouraged to register for Bachelor's degree after a year or two of library work experience. It is not advisable both for the profession and individual students to regard diploma qualification as a normal pre-qualification for Bachelor of Library Science. It may reduce the prestige of the profession and individual librarians concerned.

### **Reasons for Reading**

#### **Bachelor of Library Science:**

In developed countries of Britain and America, interest is usually one of the major reasons an individual joins a profession. In Nigeria, because there are very limited opportunities, a degree is regarded as a passport to all good things in life. In such a situation, interest is certainly of secondary importance in choosing a profession. It is very surprising that contrary to the author's opinion, the highest number of respondents indicated "interested

in librarianship" (63.5%) as one of the reasons for reading Bachelor of Library Science (Table II).

**Table II**  
**Reasons for Entering Library Science Programme**

| REASONS FOR ENTERING LIBRARY SCIENCE PROGRAMME          | N = 189 |      |
|---|---------|------|
|   | No.     | %    |
| To improve self   | 114     | 60.3 |
| To update qualifications for higher Salary              | 84      | 44.4 |
| To make closer to friends qualification or social level | 88      | 46.5 |
| Interested in Librarianship                             | 120     | 63.5 |
| Family (Parents) encouragement                          | 48      | 25.2 |
| Friends had obtained Library Science qualifications     | 88      | 46.6 |
| Others  | 25      | 13.2 |

A degree is highly valued in many places in Nigeria. Many school leavers know that without a degree he cannot get beyond junior or intermediate position in many establishments. Hence, the large number of respondents who indicated "to improve self", as a reason for reading Bachelor of Library Science (60.3%).

It is important to note the large number of respondents who indicated "to make closer to friends qualification or social level" and "friends had obtained library qualifications," (46.5% and 46.6 respectively). The fact is that in a society where the bulk of the parents are uneducated, where there are no career masters in many schools, career choice is likely to be determined by

chance or by the type of friends a youth keeps. It is surprising to note that 48 respondents or 25.2% indicated "family (parents) encouragement," From the writers' experience, there appears to be little occupational prejudice, though great emphasis is given to the level of education sought for one's children particularly among the educated group.

### **Placement of B.L.S. Graduates**

Between June, 1971, the first year of graduation and June, 1980, the tenth year of graduation, the Department has graduated 276 Librarians, who are working in various libraries in Nigeria. Of 189 graduates in this study, 96 respondents, or 51% are employed in academic libraries. This finding reinforces the findings of previous studies, including the 1966 survey by John Dean<sup>16</sup> and Harris<sup>17</sup> when they found 59 and 50% respectively employed in academic libraries. The fact is that academic libraries are better organised than any other type of libraries in Nigeria. In addition, academic libraries have expanded tremendously within the past few years. For example, there was only one institution of university status in 1948 the number rose to thirteen in 1975 and today, there are about thirty universities.

In spite of rapid educational development at all levels, school libraries are poor and non-existing in many secondary schools and Teacher Training Colleges<sup>18</sup>. In addition, with few exceptions, public libraries are poor and located only in major towns and cities<sup>19</sup>. Hence, only 33 librarians or 17.5% are employed in public libraries. It is interesting to note that 60 librarians or 31.8% are employed in special libraries. Just like the academic libraries, the oil boom of the mid 1970s has led to the establishment and development of many special libraries.

### **Extent of difficulties in Working in Various Units of the Library**

There is need for professional schools to make their courses educationally valuable and practically relevant. This is more so in Nigeria where new library school graduates on their first appointment have been confronted with the responsibility of organizing a collection for which there is no previous pattern of any kind. Moreover, librarians in this part of the world may be isolated by distance from their immediate colleagues in the profession, the result is that first hand advice, or even of moral support is hard to come by. The educational conclusions to be drawn here is that the responsibilities of a library school become greater; their courses cannot be a substitute for experience, but they must somehow allow for the kind of future students may rapidly encounter.

In order to study whether the respondents' educational preparation was related to their knowledge of the world of work, the graduates were asked to indicate the extent of difficulties in working in various units of the library. There were four possible responses to each specific library unit – would work comfortably," "difficult for me to work," "would dislike to work," and "wouldn't work, no training".

An examination of Table III make it clear that an overwhelming number of respondents would work comfortably in "cataloguing," "reference" "collection development," and "circulation," units (84.7, 81.5, 78.8 and 75.1 respectively). It is disheartening to note the large number that indicated "difficult for me", "would dislike to work," and "wouldn't work, no training," in audio visual unit (31.8, 17.5, and 25.4% respectively). The fact is that apart from a brief period when the department was blessed with a visiting lecturer from the college of Librarianship Wales, there has never been a regular staff assigned to teach a course in non-print media. Non-print courses either as a separate course or as an integral part of other library science courses are lacking in all the departmental prospectus since its inception. With the current development in communication, no library school education can be complete without a working knowledge in computer and other non-print media.

Table III  
Extent of Difficulties in Working in Various Units of the Library

| LIBRARY UNIT                | EXTENT OF DIFFICULTY IN WORKING IN THE UNIT |                                  |                                |                                    |          | TOTAL<br>No % |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|---------------|
|                             | Would work Comfortably<br>No %              | Difficult for me to Work<br>No % | Would Dis-like to Work<br>No % | Wouldn't work, no Training<br>No % |          |               |
| COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT UNIT | 149 78.8                                    | 27 14.3                          | 3 1.6                          | 10 5.3                             | 189 100% |               |
| CATALOGUING UNIT            | 160 84.7                                    | 21 11.1                          | 4 2.1                          | 4 2.1                              | 189 100% |               |
| CIRCULATION UNIT            | 142 75.1                                    | 16 8.5                           | 23 12.2                        | 8 4.2                              | 189 100% |               |
| REFERENCE UNIT              | 154 81.5                                    | 19 10.1                          | 8 4.2                          | 8 4.2                              | 189 100% |               |
| AUDIO-VISUAL UNIT           | 48 25.4                                     | 60 31.8                          | 33 17.5                        | 48 25.4                            | 189 100% |               |

## Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The general purpose of this study was to examine the career experience of past students who enrolled for the Bachelor of Library Science of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated academic qualification of past students before entering library school, reason(s) for reading Bachelor of Library Science, type of libraries graduates are employed and the extent to which the graduates can work comfortably in various units of the library.

Data relating to the experience of past students were gathered through the use of an inquiry form. Discussions were held with some of the respondents. A total of 189 usable forms were received, representing 68.5 percent of all the past students.

More than half of the respondents entered the programme with General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level. Less than one fifth of the respondents were ex-diploma holders. The major reasons for reading library science are "interested in librarianship" and "to improve self" (63.5 and 60.3% respectively). More than half of the respondents are employed in academic libraries. The majority of the respondents can work comfortably in almost all sections of the library except audio-visual section.

From the analysis of data above, the following conclusions may be drawn. The sub-professional holders of undergraduate diploma are trained to have the minimum competence required to perform some essential library duties or take care of small libraries. Because the overwhelming majority of the library work in Nigeria are in government or semi-government establishments. Rank at entry depends on almost entirely on an educational qualification. As a result, nine out of every ten diploma holders are bent on reading for a degree programme. The best among

diploma holders could be admitted into degree programme but should not be required as another pre-qualification for Bachelor of Library Science. Diploma holders in degree programme should devote more time to other academic disciplines such as history, chemistry, biology etc. to compensate their low academic qualification.

Sources of information on careers are very limited to school leavers in Nigeria. There is need for library schools to systematically educate young school leavers on the career opportunities in Librarianship. This could be done by posters and booklets sent directly to Ministry of Education and some Principals of big schools.

In view of the large number of applicants into the degree programme, there is need for the Department to be more selective in its student selection. Interview before student selection is desirable and highly recommended.

Unfamiliarity with equipment and ignorance of non-print media will lead to a lack of commitment on the part of librarians produced in the Department if care is not taken. There is urgent need to introduce non-print media courses. In addition, all library sciences courses should be restructured to incorporate print and non-print media as sources of information, education and recreation.

What has been said in criticism is not meant to discredit achievements of Bachelor of Library Science programme at Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria. Considering the circumstances, what has been achieved is remarkable. Any new development in library education in Nigeria to be truly useful must be truly Nigeria. But what is Nigeria may not be necessarily different from what others have. Personnel exchanges between Nigerian library schools, the United States and Britain offer one possibility for improvement in Nigeria education for Librarianship.

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