APPRAISAL OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY STANDARDS AS MEASUREMENT FOR NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper discusses the ‘Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) approved standards for academic libraries aimed at assisting academic institutions and accrediting agencies understand the components of an excellent library. It attempts to explore comparative analysis of Nigerian academic library standards and the ACRL standards as it affects service delivery. The paper does not claim that ACRL standards are perfect but attempts to look at the advantages of the standards if complied with by Nigerian Academic Libraries. The paper concludes by recommending positions of the author for better service delivery in Nigerian Academic Libraries.
Introduction

A division of the American Library Association (ALA) called “Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) approved standards for academic libraries in June 2004. The standards are however, intended to libraries supporting academic programs at institutions of higher education and they are unique and different from the earlier standards for libraries which relied heavily upon resources and program.

Academic libraries in this part of the globe are faced with multi-dimensional challenges ranging from ICT exploration, service delivery, currency of collections, training and retraining, administration and facilities among others. The role of academic libraries in any part of the globe is indispensable in the realization of the set objective of the academic institutions by supporting the institutions programs through effective planning, acquisition of current and relevant materials and making them readily available as required by all categories of users in the academic communities. Academic libraries include that of universities, colleges, and polytechnics which defers in terms of nature and peculiarity of the institution they serve. But, one imperative that is common to all these academic libraries is
that, they have similar objectives and services. This will form the basis for using ACRL standards as measurement for all Nigerian Academic Libraries.

However, this paper does not claim that ACRL standards are perfect. In fact, certain aspects of the standards are criticized as it affects Academic Libraries in Nigeria. The educational sector in Nigeria witnessed several reformations recently, in order to save the sector from collapsing and finding a place in the global educational arena. Academic Libraries play a crucial role in actualizing this dream of educational development in Nigeria by supplying the information energy needed to propel the desired development. This is the justification for the academic libraries to conform to the required standards in order to meet up with the challenges of the information driven economy.
ACRL STANDARDS

PLANNING

Croft et-al (2002) defines Planning as “the process of determining the future direction of an organization, the formulation and implementation of strategy that will enhance its overall competitiveness”. ACRL standards are of the opinion that a library should have a mission statement and goals which will serve as a framework for its activities. This mission and goals however should be consistent and compatible with those developments by the institution. This is to enable the serving library build its program and services in the context of the institution. Right from the beginning, the library should be involved in strategic planning which is the overall process that involves evaluation, updating and refinement. This will serves as a guide to day-to-day activities and decision making. It will also help the community on its essential values and provides an overall direction.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

Okpalla (1999) opined assessment as totality of strategies put in place to measure feedback for services rendered. Assessment and evaluation are synonyms which could be used interchangeably in
academic library services. According to ACRL standard (2004) questions should related to how well the library support its mission and how it achieve its goals and objectives. In carrying out library goals and objectives, it can be an active mechanism for improving current library practices. Library users should be encouraged to offer suggestions, comments, and advice. The changing rhythm of the academic year should be considered in the assessment strategies which should lead to outcomes assessment that will measure and affect continuous process. According to ACRL (2004) the following could be used as evaluation tools:

i. General library knowledge survey;

ii. Evaluation check list for librarian;

iii. Student journal entries, used to track their library use expenses;

iv. Assessment and evaluation by libraries from other institution;

v. Focus groups of student, faculty, staff, and alumni who are asked to comment on their library experience; and

vi. Review of specific library and information service areas and or operations.
RESOURCES, SERVICES AND ACCESS

ACRL, (2004) recommended that academic libraries should provide varied, authoritative and up to date resources that support the needs of its users. These resources could be provided on site or from remote storage locations, main campus and or off-campus locations. Moreover, resources may be in a variety of items including print or hard copy, and online electronic format. The library should provide quality resources in the most efficient manner which could be maintained through judicious weeding. Wheeler (1999) posited that, resources should be the watch word of any efficient academic library. The services of the library should be qualitative through the provision of competent and prompt assistance to users. Hours of access to the library should be reasonable and convenient to its users. Librarian and other special assistance should be available at times when the institution primary users need them.

In accessing library materials, the collections and the catalogue should be organized using national bibliographic standards. Provision should be made for inter library loan, consortia borrowing agreements, access to virtual electronic collections, and document
delivery to provide access to collections not owned by the library: Distance learning programs should be supported by equivalent means such as remote electronic access to collections, the provision of reliable network connections, and electronics transmission of library materials to remote users.

Communication is an essential part of any system for it to function effectively. Orr (1977) opined that ‘the library is a knowledge communication system. Adequate manpower is pertinent towards good academic library services delivery. Mitchell (2007) opined that “Librarians should be the match makers that bring materials to the people who use them. This must cut-across all levels of the library, from the top of the bottom and vise-verse. There should be adequate communication mechanism with other departments on campus. There should equally be relationship between the library and the information technology staff in providing access to electronic information resources. The technologists usually provides technical infrastructure while the librarian will select and provide information content. It is pertinent to note that the system work collaboratively and keep each other informed regardless of the fact that there is no single organization model that will work for all institutions.
Radar (2007) is of the opinion that space and other required facilities to students for research activities in the library should be well planned and also provides secured and adequate space conducive to study and research with suitable environmental conditions for its services. ACRL recommended that staff should be sufficient in size and quality in order to meet the programmatic and service need of its primary users. Librarians should have a graduate degree and necessary professional qualifications from an ALA- accredited program. There may be other professional staff that will have appropriate combinations of training, experience, and / or degrees.

**ADMINISTRATION AND BUDGET**

Given the scenario that resources are scarce, it entails that available scarce resources be properly utilized. Administration deal with day to day monitoring of the functions of an origination and it uses people as well as material in ensuring that the set objectives of such organization are achieved. According to ACRL (2004) Academic libraries should be administered in a manner that permits and encourages the most effective use of available library services. The responsibilities and authorities of the Library Director or Dean should be defined in writing. The library should be administered in
accordance with the spirit of the “Library Bill Rights” (LBR) the budget should meet the reasonable expectation of library users when balanced against other institutional needs. ACRL recommended that the library Director/Dean should have authority to apportion funds and initiate expenditures within the library budget and in accordance with institutional policy.

**DISCUSSIONS**

The ACRL planning standards is quite desirable if any meaningful impact of academic library services would be felt by the parent institution, but it is obvious that higher institutions in Nigeria do not carry the libraries along in the planning processes in order to build its programs and services in the context of the institution.

Ajayi (2001) postulated that “the 21st century academic libraries have transformed into a new information inter-library loan and electronic calculation functions” services such as e-mail alerts are also carried out. When libraries are not carried along in the planning processes, it will be difficult to adapt to any services arising from the introduction of digital.
Planning should be such that is flexible for future implementation of programs. In assessing and evaluating library materials, it is unfortunate especially in this part of the world that little or nothing is done in this regard. Comprehensive assessment is not being carried out in most academic libraries in conformity with ACRL assessment standards. It could be argued that certain factors ranging from managerial, finance, lack of adequate personnel and so on could be-devilled the compliance. Most academic libraries do not give enough participation to users in evaluation process not to talk of outcomes assessment which identifies performance measurement. Hours of access to the library in most cases are reasonable and convenient for users. Some academic libraries operate round the clock when students are on campus especially during examinations. University of Ilorin library experimented this during the last semester’s examinations when access to the library was made twenty-four hours with stable supply of electricity.

ACRL Standards on resources is most appropriate especially the provision of authoritative and up to date resources that support its mission and the needs of its users. Recent survey indicates that most academic libraries do not have current materials, at least those
published in the last ten years to-date. ACRL emphasis on online electronic text or images, and other media. That is the only direction that the world is moving today. Although, there could be challenges in actualizing ICT as a digital means of processing and accessing information materials in this part of the globe, but they are surmountable. This is because on line information accessibility are necessary condition if we need to be part of the global development that has revolutionized the world. Montero (2008) at a faculty lecture delivered at the University of Ilorin looked at the united state of America educational market place at around $900billion, while on-line education is about $90billion. Other advantages of on-line information accessibility include:

i. Expansion of access;

ii. Increase in institution capacity; and

iii. Profit driven capacity.

Although, it could be argued that massification of education does lead to other problems. The staff requirements and specifications according to ACRL are adequate by my judgment, but the clause that “librarian should be a graduate degree holder from ALA accredited program” is a minus. The restriction should be reviewed. In the
overall analysis, ACRL Standards are designed specifically without considering the peculiar domestic situations in Africa and other continents outside the developed world.

Be that as it may, the standards are enjoyed and good if any meaningful development is to be sustained as far as academic library standards are concerned.
RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that libraries of higher education should be carried along in strategic planning in order to meet the set goals and objectives of the institution.
- Continuous training and re-training of academic library staff is recommended.
- Academic library authorities should make fund available in order to acquire materials.
- Comprehensive assessment of library materials should be carried out with adequate participation by users.
- Where there are in-adequate facilities, efforts should be made to address them.
- It is recommended that academic libraries should digitalize their services for global relevance.
- Evaluation process should be made available electronically giving opportunities for all categories of users to participate.
REFERENCES


