

# **“PROVISION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS”, RETHINKING LIS COURSE CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF IGNATIUS AJURU UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, PORT HARCOURT RIVERS STATE**

**Nnenda W. Tom-George PhD**

*Department of Library and Information Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,  
P. M. B. 5047, Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.*

[nnenda.tomgeorge@iaue.edu.ng](mailto:nnenda.tomgeorge@iaue.edu.ng), [nicennenda@gmail.com](mailto:nicennenda@gmail.com)

## **ABSTRACT**

*Education remains key to human and national development. A comprehensive detailed and all-encompassing course curriculum serves as the foundation for quality education that is expected to yield the desired outcome. It is very crucial to consider this aspect carefully when pursuing a degree in Library and Information Science. Seasoned librarians with special needs skills that can man libraries (irrespective of type) should be taken into cognizance. This discourse therefore advocates that rethinking and revising LIS course curriculum (Provision of Library and Information Services to People with Special Needs LIS 221) to accommodate other aspects of special needs is an absolute necessity and a top priority. It suggests that LIS curriculum should include human rights advocacy, administering of first aid services for users with special needs, bibliotherapy to people with special needs among others. The course can be expanded to run through two semesters instead in 200 level.*

**Keywords:** *Rethinking, Library and Information Science, Course Curriculum, Special Needs.*

## **1. Introduction**

The Library in any higher institution of learning remains the hub, life wire and heartbeat of its institution. It is the real centre of excellence and remains the gateway to achieving personal and national development. The library as the centre of academic attraction in any institution is to be manned by a professional equipped with appropriate skills to meet the needs of the clientele. There has been suitable curriculum in Library and Information Science that is generally acceptable and serves as a benchmark for the running of the LIS programme in universities. No doubt the available curriculum has served as a required minimum standard for trainees in the field. Aina (2014) opines that LIS is a dynamic profession that has grown over the years and this profession still grows on daily basis. Library schools for this reason need to edit and upgrade their curriculum regularly in order to broaden the horizon of undergraduate students in this area. Users with special needs use the library more than before which makes it obvious for librarians to review and have additional skills that will be used to effectively meet the needs of its users. These

skills include: different sign languages to meet the needs of the hearing impaired (sign language based on location-American, British or Native signs), assisting the visually impaired with their devices, users with mobility disorders as well as users with learning and intellectual disabilities.

The term “Curriculum” means different things to different educators depending on how it is been used. Ochoma (2020) is of the view however, that curriculum should not be seen as school subjects meant to be taught to the learner, neither should it be seen as syllabus, scheme of work, lesson notes or time table. In other words, curriculum should contain much more. She defines curriculum as a term traced to a Latin word “Currere” meaning “to run”. It is a course to be run before the attainment of a goal. Bobbit in Ochoma (2020) defines curriculum as series of things people must do and experience by way of developing abilities and do things very well, that will later make up an adult life. Based on this statement curriculum should be seen as a teaching plan (and not lesson note) that guides the activities of an institution’s settings.

Mba (2003) defines curriculum as a

systematic plan of activities that are taken by learners and guided by schools in order to get the aims and objectives at a particular level. Curriculum no doubt is a systematic Organisation by educators with the aim of impacting complete knowledge at the end. Omiebi-Davids (2006) is of the opinion that the term "curriculum" is seen differently among various educators. There are different views of what constitute concepts of curriculum and this may be because different schools of thought see curriculum in a way most suitable and appropriate to them.

Curriculum can be viewed as an overall content and structure of a desired educational program to include courses and learning experiences that students are meant to cover during their educational period in an institution. The curriculum outlines the student expectations and set goals as well as learning and experiential outcomes.

#### **Brief History of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science Programme**

The decision to commence the above programme was taken in the senate meeting of 2015 for 2016/2017 session. All requirements like appointments and human resources were drafted according to National University Commission demands. A verification team from NUC Abuja, came for verification and approved the four-year programme. The curriculum for this approved course consists of core, cognate and elective courses.

The aim of the department is to train, qualify and present students who will be able to cope competently with resources and information services in libraries and information centres. Objectives of the programme as listed in the departmental handbook (1019/2020) are to:  
Produce competent personnel for all professional work in libraries.

*Prepare librarians for effective management of resource collections in all types of libraries.*

*To equip students with skills to instruct readers in library use, information handling skills and teach library skills to users in various levels of education.*

*Lay foundation for further studies (at*

*postgraduate level) in library and information science.*

The admission requirements for a BLS degree are five credits with compulsory credit pass in Mathematics and English in not more than two examination sittings. The candidate must also pass the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The department equally admits direct entry students with diploma and certificates

#### **The Discourse**

Nwosu (2018) opines that curriculum is the totality of academic experience given to students in the journey to becoming graduates and this is what is needed for personal and national development. The author categorically states that LIS curriculum is the difference between LIS graduate and non-LIS graduate. In the light of the above view, a given curriculum that is considered adequate should have courses in the conventional areas and in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Librarianship in Nigeria has grown over the years as one of the projects handed over to us by the colonial masters. Recall that the very first library school in Nigeria came on board at university of Ibadan in 1959 known as Institute of Librarianship with Mr. John Harris as its pioneer director. This institute later became known as Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies in University of Ibadan (Okiy, 2015). It was a definite milestone in the development of the profession in the country because Nigerians travelled all the way to Britain to qualify for the Associate of the Library Association (ALA). It marked the beginning of library education in Nigeria and paved way for the development of other library schools in Nigeria. Okiy equally strengthened that the beauty about this development is that educational syllabus of the Americans and the British have been edited and tailored to meet our local needs here in Nigeria.

There have been various ideal curricula prepared to suit the needs of trainees and employers in the area of Library and Information Science. Aina (2007) in Aina (2014) stipulates that "curriculum must be in tandem with the

requirements of both current and potential employers of LIS trainees. The curriculum must be relevant to the immediate environment. It must in addition reflect the best international practices" In this argument, Aina further strengthens that LIS trainees are expected to offer a variety of multidisciplinary courses because employers are heterogeneous and any curriculum designed should take this salient point into consideration.

In this dispensation, the goals of library education are now thorough, all inclusive and geared at graduating librarians who can manage and provide library services effectively to meet library user's information needs. Fatemeh, Farhad & Akran (2009) in Arumuru & Tom-George (2021) are of the opinion that library and information science education should be channeled towards:

*Critical thinking, applying creativity in problem solving, logical reasoning and analyzing scientific information.*

*Fostering skills in self-study as well as group study.*

*Accepting social duties in a positive and responsible manner.*

*Thinking globally and acting locally.*

*Respecting others' notions and ideas.*

There is no doubt that librarianship as a profession has grown tremendously with much improvements, moving from traditional ways of serving users to hybrid and then fully digital services. The crusade for inclusive library services for people with special needs has also been a welcome development and has been on going. In recent times there has been a comprehensive curriculum with which intending librarians can cover to become professionals. Some of the items include: History of library and information science, Introduction to library science, Organisation of knowledge, Technical Services in libraries, Reference and Information sources and services, Information literacy, Library science in rural areas, Serials management, Library marketing, School librarianship, Archives and records management, Library administration, Research methods, Entrepreneurship, digital librarianship and Library services to users with special needs.

## STANDARD COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR FOUR YEARS BLS PROGRAMME

### COURSE OUTLINE

#### YEAR ONE FIRST SEMESTER

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	GNS 111	Communication skills in English 1	2	C
2	GNS 112	History and philosophy of science	2	C
	EDU 111	Introduction to teaching profession	2	C
4	PES 115	Primary education studies	2	E
5	LIS 111	Introduction to library and information work	3	C
6	LIS 112	Introduction to ICT	3	C
7	LIS 113	Information resources and services	3	C
8	LIS 114	Introduction to knowledge organization 1 (classification)	3	C
		Total	20	

#### YEAR ONE SECOND SEMESTER

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	GNS 121	Use of library, study skills and information communication technologies	2	C
2	PES 122	The Nigerian child and socio-political environment	2	C
3	EDU 121	History of education	2	C
4	LIS 121	Introduction to library and information science	3	C

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5	LIS 122	Libraries and societies	3	C
6	LIS 123	Information users/literacy	3	E
7	LIS 124	Information retrieval 1 (cataloguing)	3	C
		Total	18	

**YEAR TWO FIRST SEMESTER**

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	GNS 211	Communication skills in English II	2	C
2	UT 1	Community service	1	C
3	EDU 212	Educational administration	2	C
4	EDU 211	Educational psychology	2	E
5	LIS 211	Principle and theories of library and information science	3	C
6	LIS 212	Multi-media application in library and information centers	3	C
7	LIS 213	Knowledge organization (classification) II	3	C
8	LIS 214	Information retrieval (cataloguing) II	3	C
		Total Units	19	

**YEAR TWO SECOND SEMESTER**

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	GNS 221	General entrepreneurial skills and management	2	C
2	GNS 223	Peace studies and conflict resolution	2	C
3	EDU 223	Educational Technology	2	C
4	CIT 214	Adult and comparative services to people with special needs	2	C
5	LIS 221	LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS	3	C
6	LIS 222	School libraries and media resources centers (literature & library services for young people)	3	C
7	LIS 223	Use of computers in library practices and library automation (internet and information searching) I	3	C
		Total Units	17	

**YEAR THREE FIRST SEMESTER**

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	UT II	Community services	1	C
2	EDU 311	Test and measurement	2	E
3	EDM 313	Educational and national development	2	E
4	EDM 302	Economics of education	2	E
5	LIS 311	Research methodology in library archives & information science	3	C
6	LIS 312	Management of digital libraries	2	C
7	LIS 313	Indexing and abstracting	3	C
8	LIS 314	Bibliography and citation techniques	3	C
	OPTIONAL COURSES			

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	LIS 315	Advocacy and marketing	1	E
	LIS 316	System analysis & design	1	E
		Total Units	18	

YEAR THREE SECOND SEMESTER

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	EDU 322	Research methods and statistics	2	C
2	GCE 322	Teenage counseling	2	E
3	EDM 320	Educational policies and reforms in Nigeria	2	R
4	LIS 321	Internet and information searching II	2	E
5	LIS 322	Entrepreneurship library & information services	2	C
6	LIS 323	Preservation and security of library & information resources	2	C
7	LIS 324	Field experience (SIWES)	6	C
	OPTIONAL COURSE			
	LIS 325	Resources sharing & networking	1	E
	LIS 326	System analysis and design	1	E
	LIS 327	Data base design and management	1	E
		Total Units	18	

YEAR FOUR FIRST SEMESTER

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	LIS 411	Library administration and management of digital libraries	3	C
2	LIS 412	Library advocacy and marketing	2	C
3	LIS 413	Knowledge management	3	C
4	LIS 414	Management of audio-visual materials	3	E
5	LIS 415	Quantitative methods in library & information science	3	C
		Total Units	14	

YEAR FOUR SECOND SEMESTER

S/N	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	UNIT	DESIGN
1	LIS 421	Indexing abstracting, bibliography and citation techniques	3	C
2	LIS 422	Entrepreneurship in library & information resources	2	C
3	LIS 423	Web technology	2	C
4	LIS 424	Information policy and analysis	3	C
5	LIS 425	Project	6	C
		Total Units	16	

(Culled from Departmental Handbook of Department of Library and Information Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. 2019/2020 Session)

The above curriculum meets the National Universities Commission (NUC) benchmark for the course which meets the expectation for the award of Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree and it is obvious that the area of special needs in Librarianship is not entirely new in Nigeria. Different Libraries from time to time have made concerted efforts to provide materials and services to people with special

needs like providing braille materials (and skeletal services on using them), large print books, wheel chairs, assistive facilities and sign language interpreters but most librarians have limited knowledge in the area of special needs and as a result, their efforts have been limited and inconsistent.

COURSE CODE, TITLE AND COURSE CONTENT OF LIS 221

5	LIS 221	<p>LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:</p> <p>Definition, concept and scope of information services to people with special needs</p> <p>Types of people with special needs with special reference to Nigeria</p> <p>The physically challenged; gifted people as users with learning disabilities</p> <p>Psychology of persons with persons with special needs</p> <p>Information resources for persons with special needs</p> <p>User support services</p> <p>Information and Communication Technology application to library and information services to people with special needs</p>	3	C
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A good look at the above course highlighted shows that special needs is one of the courses approved by the NUC as a requirement for the fulfillment of an award of a Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree in any Nigerian University. It has been observed that there are challenges encountered while working with library users with special needs and these challenges include but not limited to the following:

Challenges in the area of Special Needs:

*The major challenge in the area of special needs can be traced to insufficient training in the course formulated.*

*Inadequate resources and funding to procure assistive facilities that can aid and support teaching in this area. Many libraries in Nigeria lack the necessary infrastructure, technology and staff that can give the needed services to library patrons with disabilities.*

*Most librarians do not have the basic practical skills to work with patrons with special needs. This point will still be traced to lack of exposure to people with special needs.*

*There is the challenge of outreach and marketing. They lack creative strategies to reach people with special needs and promote library services. This again boils down to insufficient training and perhaps the need to*

*edit the course content and curriculum.*

*Librarians lack understanding of disability issues. This will obviously lead to lack of support if librarians fail to advocate convincingly.*

**Way Forward**

This narrative therefore advocates the need to review the course outline and expand where necessary, to better the working lot of librarians and the upcoming ones.

One good way of tackling insufficient training in this present dispensation is for librarians to be intentional about their growth in the profession. It is not enough to have a degree and be comfortable with just that. It has also become indisputable that having a terminal degree will not suffice for the crucial work to be carried out in the library by librarians especially in the area of assisting library users with special needs. Courses on special needs were not there from the inception of Librarianship and for this reason; librarians need to be proactive in acquiring more skills that will boost their job performances. Some suitable training that can enhance librarians' work in serving people with special needs are: online training (with or without certificates), On-the-Job training, workshops,



mentoring, coaching, games, soft skills etc. Having suggested this as one of the ways of boosting work effectiveness, the NUC benchmark should cover additional courses to broaden special needs areas in the department for upcoming librarians.

Librarians can master first aid skills. It has been observed that there are special needs users who experience crisis in the library while reading or making use of library facilities. Some medical problems like asthmatic attacks, epileptic seizures, high blood pressures and ulcers may occur. This service can be applied where there is no doctor. Yin et al (2023) opine that FA is a skill anyone can have and use to intervene in injury without medical equipment. They maintain that FA cannot prevent injury such as burns, stroke or cardiac arrest but can mitigate the consequences of these unintentional injuries and save lives in some cases. Librarians are not medical doctors but can help save lives with FA skills when they find users in crises.

Bibliotherapy is another additional course that can be included in the course curriculum. The term is also used interchangeably with bibliocounselling, biblioeducation, bibliopsychology, library therapeutics and litera-therapy. Russel defines it as a method used in handling emotional or psychological matters through literature that aids individuals in coping. Bibliotherapy is a powerful tool for encouraging mental health and well-being in schools, hospitals as well as libraries. Owning therapeutic skills can be one outstanding powerful tool that can effectively aid a librarian's job in affecting people with special needs very positively.

Librarians should endeavour to source for sponsorships and educational grants. Some funds can be got through Tertiary Education Funds (TETFUND), International NGOs and other funding agencies like the Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation amongst others. These grants and

aids when harnessed can go a long way to improve the skills of librarians in handling users with special needs. Special needs facilities and equipment can also be stocked in the faculty libraries and this will make room for expansion educationally if this can be achieved.

There is growing need for librarians to collaborate with psychologists in order to form a powerful partnership that will empower librarians to master the psychological needs of the users with special needs. This team work and joint effort will aid librarians already working the library to have an understanding of the psychology of the users.

There should be a course in human rights and advocacy to address the rights of users with special needs. It is their fundamental human rights to have special needs facilities in place so that they can effectively explore the benefits of using the library like other users. Librarians should be empowered through some courses that can effectively make them human advocates that can champion and defend the rights of people with special needs so that their rights to education, health, transportation, shelter, information and equity in employment opportunities work will no longer be violated. The span can be stretched to two semesters if the course is eventually expanded.

## **2. Conclusion**

Without doubt, change is a constant phenomenon and it has become expedient call for NUC to review the course contents and upgrade LIS 221 accordingly. Thus, there is need for LIS lecturers to brainstorm on the best way forward. New courses can be formulated by librarians to meet the best global practices in the area of librarianship and special needs. This review is timely and necessary, and its significance should not be underestimated.

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