

# Characteristics of Library and Information Science Journals published in West Africa

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Received: 19<sup>th</sup> May 2005

Accepted: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2005

*In order to establish the characteristics of library and information science (LIS) journals published in West Africa, twelve active LIS journals published in Nigeria and Ghana were surveyed. The findings reveal that majority of the journals had been in existence for over 10 years, the editors were highly qualified and experienced, as seven of the editors possessed doctoral degrees in library and information science, four of the editors were university professors and another four were university librarians. Other characteristics of the journals are: they are all peer-reviewed, many of the journals were published behind schedule, a large proportion of the journals was funded mainly by professional associations at the national and provincial levels, many of the journals have limited international recognition and visibility and they are generally inadequately funded. Only one of the journals is involved in electronic publishing. The study recommends that some of the journals be merged and those that remain should be adequately funded by their sponsors in order for them to perform their functions effectively. It is also suggested that LIS journals in West Africa should avail themselves of the opportunities of electronic publishing.*

**Key words:** Library and Information Science: Scientific Journals: West Africa

## Introduction

The journal is an important medium for communicating research findings, because it carries the latest developments in the profession. It circulates widely and it is meant to appear indefinitely. It is also published at specified intervals. Thus, LIS researchers in West Africa, like their counterparts in other parts of the world regularly submit manuscripts to journal editors for the purpose of disseminating their research findings.

The role of journals in scholarly communication is pre-eminent because it largely documents original knowledge. According to Altbach (1998:1) "journals are more than a means of communication. They report new knowledge; they interpret research and they provide a forum for debate and discussion. In a sense, they define the nature of their field. A journal that is innovative and aware of new trends can help push forward the frontiers of knowledge." Zelesa (1998:13) stated that "journals constitute the life blood of scholarly enterprise. They provide a medium through which scholars communicate and converse with each other; ideas are circulated and consumed and research results are disseminated and debated". Teferra (1998:42) also described journals as "vehicles of communication for a society of learned scholars. They inform new discoveries, initiate further research and inquiry and help advance frontiers of knowledge. They are highly valued and rated and are a major part of the academic culture."

These scholars have lucidly described the importance of a journal in the scholarly communication of research findings. Thus, a journal must be published regularly.

## History of LIS journals in West Africa

LIS research has been carried out in West Africa over the years. As far back as the 1940s and 1950s, librarianship as one of the legacies of colonialism, had been fairly developed in West Africa. Most libraries were manned by expatriates, who, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, were conducting research and regularly reporting their research findings in journals published abroad.

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The first LIS journal in West Africa, known as the *West African Libraries*, was published in 1954. It was the official publication of the West African Library Association. The journal later changed its name in the same year to *WALA News*. This journal was discontinued in 1962, when WALA broke up into the individual library associations of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia. Each of these associations except Gambia established its own journal, *Ghana Library Journal* was established in 1963; *Nigerian Libraries* in 1964 and *Sierra Leone Libraries* in 1974.

In Nigeria between 1964 and 1991, there was a proliferation of LIS journals as nineteen LIS journals had appeared at one time or the other in the country (Ifidon, 1994). Aina (2003) reported that by 1992, within a space of 27 years after the first journal devoted mainly to Nigeria, *Nigerian Libraries* was established, only seven LIS journals remained out of the 19, others had ceased publishing.

Eleven new LIS journals were established between 1992 and 2003. These are:

- (i) Abuja Infolib Journal of Library and Information science
- (ii) Delta Library Journal
- (iii) Frontiers of Information and Library Science: The Journal of the World Information Community
- (iv) Gateway Library Journal
- (v) Information Manager
- (vi) Journal of the Association of Libraries for the Visually Handicapped
- (vii) Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa (IFLA)
- (viii) Leading Libraries
- (ix) Middle Belt Library Journal
- (x) Samaru Journal of Information Studies
- (xi) Trends in Library and Information Science: Journal of the Imo State Chapter of the Nigerian Library Association

Two of these journals, *Leading Libraries* and *Frontiers of Information and Library Science: The Journal of the World Information Community* have since ceased publishing. *Gateway Library Journal*, *Journal of the Association of Libraries for the Visually Handicapped*, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa (IFLA)* and *Trends in Library and Information Science: Journal of the Imo State Chapter of the Nigerian Library Association* were still very active at the time this study was carried out while *Information Manager* and *Samaru Journal of Information Studies* have just produced their maiden issues. Thus, there are 18 LIS journals in existence in Nigeria. Many of them appearing several years behind schedule.

Apart from *Ghana Library Journal* that started in 1963 in Ghana, *Legon Librarian-Archivist* was established by Ghana Library School in 1976. It first published in 1976 and it has since ceased publishing.

*Sierra Leone Libraries* that was established in 1974 stopped publishing in 1981 and was succeeded by SLAALIS (*Sierra Leone Association of Archives, Library and Information Science*) in 1987. It has since stopped publishing. The regional library school for French West Africa, EBAD (Ecole Bibliothecaires Archivistes et Documentalistes), Dakar Senegal, established a journal entitled *Blibad* in 1976, it ceased publishing in 1979.

### Problems of LIS journals published in West Africa

In spite of the proliferation of LIS journals in West Africa, majority of the journals are not sustainable. They have either ceased publishing, published irregularly or are in "coma". For example, the *Nigerian Libraries* which was established in 1964 was very regular up to the 1980s. After that, it was not published for some years and when it resumed publishing several issues had to be combined. Similarly, *Ghana Library Journal* was not published for 15 years (1974–1989) and when it resumed it became an annual publication. *Legon Librarian-Archivist* ceased publication after the second issue in 1979. Similarly *Sierra Leone Libraries* and its successor SLAALIS (*Sierra Leone Association of Archives, Library and Information Science*) have also stopped publishing. The journal published in Senegal entitled "*Blibad*" the journal of EBAD (Ecole Bibliothecaires Archivistes et Documentalistes), Dakar Senegal published only four issues before it went ceased publishing.

The state of LIS journals in Nigeria was so disturbing that Ifidon (1994:21) described the situation as pathetic. According to him:

The life span of Nigerian journals varies from one journal to another. In general the average life expectancy is about two years. During this short period only one or two issues are published. Those that stay active find it difficult to maintain their frequency of publication. At best two issues are published together, well after the publication date.

A decade after, the situation is still a far cry from the ideal. The features of LIS journals in West Africa can be described as follows: high mortality rate, lateness and lack of periodicity in publishing, lack of international visibility, limited distribution of journal, etc. (Aina, 1994; Apeji, 1990, Azubuike, 1990). According to Aina and Mabawonku (1996) most scholarly journals published in Africa are beset with a lot of problems such as short life span, irregularity in appearance of journals, as many of these journals sometimes come out 2-3 years behind schedule.

## Contributions of West Africa in LIS research

In spite of the problems afflicting LIS journals in West Africa, authors in Nigeria and Ghana are in the forefront of library research in Africa. In a study by Raptis (1992), he analysed five major international LIS journals published during 1989 and 1990. The findings revealed that Nigeria was among the 10 leading producers of LIS research in the world. Nigeria came third with 12.33%, after UK (28.31%) and USA (12.79%). Nigeria was ahead of India, Canada and Australia.

Uzun (2002) carried out a research analysis of 21 core LIS journals indexed in the *Social Science Citation Index* database. Papers by LIS authors from 76 developing countries and Eastern Europe were analysed. The study revealed that Nigeria was ranked first among the 76 countries with 96 articles between 1980 and 1989 representing 21.5% of the total 446 articles published during this period. Nigeria also maintained the first position during the next ten-year period, 1990-1999 while Ghana ranked 11th and 7th during the 1980-1989 and 1990-1999 periods respectively. In another study, Alemna and Badu (1994) reported that LIS authors from West Africa constituted the highest proportion of LIS researchers in Africa, as the region accounted for 54.17%. Southern and Central Africa came a distant second with the contributors from this region constituting 20.83%. Mabawonku (2001) also reported that Ghana and Nigeria contributed 54.3 % of articles published by the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* between 1991 and 1995; and 53.75% for the period 1996 -2000. There is no doubt that LIS researchers in West Africa are prolific but unfortunately, there is no nexus between the high research productivity of LIS authors and sustenance of LIS journals in West Africa. One would have expected that LIS journals would provide a ready medium for LIS authors in West Africa to publish their findings which will therefore result in regular publication of LIS journals.

Many factors are responsible for the high rate of publishing among librarians in West Africa. One of the requirements for career advancement in library schools, university and research libraries, is sustained research and publication. Also, research funding is provided by university authorities to enable librarians carry out research. This has greatly strengthened research activity amongst librarians in West Africa. Unfortunately, because of the problems of LIS journals, most authors in West Africa publish their research findings outside the region.

The main objective of this study was therefore to determine the characteristics of LIS journals published in West Africa with a view to identifying deterrents to sustainability of journals in West Africa. Thus, the characteristics of LIS journals in West Africa with respect to the editorial profile of LIS journals, editorial management and quality of journals were examined

## Methodology

In order to study the characteristics of LIS journals published in West Africa, only active LIS journals that were publishing regularly as at June 2003 when this study was carried out, were selected. Fortunately, a training course sponsored by the African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science (AJLAIS), Ibadan, Nigeria and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) Oxford, UK, facilitated the distribution of questionnaire to the editors of 12 active LIS journals who were invited to the training course. These 12 journals were used for this study; eleven were published in Nigeria and one in Ghana. There was no active LIS journal published in other West African countries apart from Nigeria and Ghana.

## Analysis and discussion of findings

The findings of this study are grouped under four major areas. These are:

- (i) Profile of journals and editors
- (ii) Editorial management of journal
- (iii) Quality indicators of the journal
- (iv) Inhibitions to sustainability of journals

### Profile of journals and editors

Four of the journals (*Nigerian Libraries*, *Ghana Library Journal*, *Nigerian School Library Journal* and *Lagos Librarian*) have been in existence for over 20 years. Three of the journals were between 11 and 20 years (*Nigeria Library and Information Science Review*, *Library Focus* and the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*). The remaining five journals were relatively new as they were established within the last five years. Ten of the journals are published twice a year while two were published annually. Majority of the journals covered all aspects of library and information science. Only two journals were highly specialised (*Nigerian School Library Journal* and *Journal of the Association of Libraries for the Visually Handicapped*). Majority of the journals were sponsored by professional associations at national and state levels. The *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* and the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa* were sponsored by a commercial publisher and an international organisation -The international Federation of Library Associations and Associated Institutions (IFLA) respectively. Most of the journals were devoted to LIS research in the

country of publication, only two of the journals (*African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* and the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa*) had continental coverage. In addition, the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa* is bilingual as it publishes in both English and French languages.

The editors of the surveyed LIS journals were highly educated and experienced in the profession. Majority of the editors were male. Only two of the editors were female. Eight of the editors had doctoral degrees in library and information science. The remaining four editors had masters in library and information science. Four of the editors were university professors, another four were university librarians, two of the editors were senior lecturers and the remaining two editors were senior professionals in special libraries. All the editors had published widely both in local and international journals. Eleven of the editors had editorial experience prior to their appointments as editors. Given the solid background of the editors and the sponsoring organisations of these journals, one would expect an efficient and effective management of LIS journals in West Africa.

### **Editorial management of LIS journals**

All the LIS journals had editorial board members that assisted the editor in the management of the journals. All the journals also had editorial policy. However, only the *African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* had a comprehensive policy that guides all the operations of journals, such as, editorial, marketing, distribution, promotion, mission and vision statements, etc. Seven of the 12 journals had a business manager specifically appointed to market and promote their journals, while for the remaining five, the editorial board members were responsible for the promotion and distribution of the journals. Since majority of the journals were sponsored by professional associations, they obtained financial support in the form of subvention mainly from their parent organisations. At the time of the study, the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa* was financed mainly by the international Federation of Library Associations and Associated Institutions (IFLA). However, it is expected that it would be self-financing after three years. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* depended mainly on subscription. Only four of the journals had international subscriptions (*African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science, Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa, Gateway Library Journal* and *Nigerian Libraries*). All the twelve journals had local subscriptions and they all reported that money generated from subscriptions was meagre and could not sustain the journals. Even purchase was usually by individuals and on cash and carry basis as many libraries did not subscribe and this included university libraries. However, the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, reported that foreign subscription provided the bulk of its funds, as 85% of its income was generated from outside the continent. Four of the journals claimed that they had separate accounts for their journals. The remaining eight did not have bank accounts for their journals, either as separate or part of a major account.

Only one of the journals, the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, was published electronically. The journal expects all manuscripts to be submitted electronically to the editor-in-chief, which are then forwarded electronically to the appropriate reviewers. The editor-in-chief sends the camera ready copy (CRC) electronically to the printer. In addition, the full texts of all the articles are available electronically in H.W. Wilson Databases ([www.hwwilson.com](http://www.hwwilson.com)).

### **Quality of LIS journals**

It is difficult to determine objectively, the quality of a LIS journal, however our aim in this paper was to use general indicators that could assist an author in deciding whether to publish in a journal or not. The indicators that an author would likely consider in determining the quality of a journal are: peer-reviewing process, frequency of publication, regularity of publication and international visibility and recognition. Thus, a journal that fulfils all these criteria would be considered to be credible and therefore authors would likely submit their manuscripts to such a journal. Where a journal is lacking in any of these, authors might not be inclined to send their manuscripts to such a journal.

When the editors were asked how they selected the papers they published in their journals, they all reported that all papers to be published in their journals were always peer-reviewed. Thus, all the LIS journals surveyed were refereed journals. Ten of the editors reported that the frequency of publication of their journals was twice a year and two of the editors reported that their journals were published once a year. All the journals except the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* were published behind schedule. Unlike in the past, when most LIS journals in Africa could be three to five years behind schedule, most of the journals surveyed were generally between one and two years behind schedule.

It is not surprising that only the *African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* is published on schedule. This was because it is the only LIS journal that depended solely on subscribers. If it were not regularly published it would lose

its source of income hence the regularity. Since 1991 when the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* was established, it has published all the 26 issues (April 1991 – October 2003) on schedule.

Only two of the journals (*African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* and *Library Focus*) were abstracted by *Library and Information Science Abstracts*. Only the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* was abstracted by *Information Science and Technology Abstracts* and indexed by *Information Science and Literature*. The situation in which most West African LIS journals were not indexed nor abstracted is not conducive for authors, as they would not gain the necessary visibility and recognition they desire. When the editors were asked to indicate if their journals had a presence on the Internet, only the *African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* and *Nigerian Libraries* were available on the Internet. Only the two journals were also covered by the African Journals Online (AJOL). This must be one of the important reasons why many LIS journals have a high mortality rate in West Africa because the younger authors in West Africa want to submit their articles to journals that would give them recognition and the renowned or senior authors would prefer journals that would befit their status.

### **Inhibitions**

Many of the LIS journals were faced with a lot of inhibitions as many factors affected the smooth running of the journals. Six of the journals indicated that funding was the major obstacle to sustainability. The editors claimed that funding was not released on time and generally the funding was usually inadequate. This is because most of the journals surveyed depended on their parent organisations to provide funding where this was not forthcoming or delayed their journals would not be produced on schedule and this is why many of the journals are produced many years behind schedule.

Managerial problem was also identified as another major factor, as there was no division of labour. Generally, the editor performed editorial function, as well as marketing and promotion functions. Since all the editors were part-time, this expectedly affected the smooth running of the journals. Because of this lack of division of labour, LIS journals in West Africa were poorly marketed. Many of the journals depended only on local subscription or sales to members. However, the *African Journal of library, Archives and Information Science* was well marketed all over the world, as it was subscribed to by libraries and information centres all over the world including 18 countries in Africa; Canada, Denmark, Germany, India, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA and Sri Lanka.

Multiplicity of official languages in West Africa was another major inhibition. According to the editor of the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa*- a bilingual journal, one of the major inhibitions in the smooth running of the journal was the paucity of manuscripts in French language. This is because unlike their counterparts in the Anglophone West Africa, authors in the Francophone West Africa are not prolific, thus it was always difficult to attract manuscripts from that part of the region.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle faced by the journals was the lack of adequate publishable manuscripts. Eight of the journals reported that they did not receive enough manuscripts that could be accepted for publication. This problem often resulted in many journals coming out many years behind schedule. Of course it should be expected that many LIS authors would not submit manuscripts to journals that would not guarantee international recognition and visibility.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

LIS journals in West Africa are not sustainable because of the various factors already identified and it would continue to be so until an enabling environment is put in place. There is no doubt that based on studies conducted on productivity of LIS authors (Raptis, 1992; Alemna and Badu, 1994; and Uzun, 2002) LIS authors in West Africa are very prolific. All the journals used in the analysis for the three studies were published outside West Africa, and yet in the three studies, authors from the West Africa region constituted a substantial proportion of authors who published in the journals analysed. Thus, it could be inferred that if LIS journals published in West Africa were sustainable, many of the manuscripts submitted to LIS journals outside the continent would have been submitted to LIS journals in West Africa. More LIS researchers in Africa would have access to local journals in which African research findings are published rather than publishing research findings that would be consulted by very few LIS researchers in those countries outside Africa. It is well known that many LIS researchers in Africa do not have access to journals published outside Africa because of the foreign exchange component involved in subscribing to such journals.

From the findings of this study, it is obvious that the editors of LIS journals published in West Africa are highly qualified and experienced. There is not much difference between the editors of LIS journals in West Africa and their counterparts outside Africa. But the main problem can be attributed to the lack of adequate funding, the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* is sustainable because funding is not considered a problem; hence it is able to publish regularly and also provides international recognition for authors who published their research findings in the journal. This is because all the articles in the journal are indexed and abstracted by international indexing and abstracting agencies.

In order for LIS journals published in West Africa to be sustainable, and thereby perform all the functions of a journal, we are proposing that some of the journals should be merged. Although Nigeria has a large population of librarians (given the paucity of quality manuscripts available to the LIS journals published in Nigeria, which are scattered thinly amongst the 18 LIS journals currently in existence) the country cannot sustain the eighteen journals. The country does not need more than half a dozen LIS journals. It is expected that these six journals will share the six geographical zones amongst them and concentrate on at least each of the zones. This will ensure that the journals will receive enough quality manuscripts from each zone, and the six journals will be sustainable as they will be better funded, since each of the geographical zones comprise between five and seven states. Thus, the journals would be in a position to appear three or four times a year, rather than between once a year to twice a year. Also, it is suggested that LIS Journals in West Africa avail themselves of the opportunities of electronic publishing, as this would improve the quality and sustainability of the journals.

We also believe that LIS journals must have their own separate accounts, as opposed to general accounts maintained by the parent organisations. This will ensure that regular publishing of journals does not depend on the whims and caprices of the president of the parent organisation. This is because a president of a professional association be it at national or provincial level, who is not well disposed to journal publishing, might not consider funding a journal top priority.

Furthermore, LIS editors must actively promote and market their journals so that they could generate other sources of income besides depending mainly on subvention. The *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* has proved that subscription could provide enough funding that would sustain a journal if it is well promoted and marketed. This is why all LIS journals in West Africa must have business managers whose schedule will be to market and promote the journal extensively.

Once LIS journals are adequately funded, the journals would be published regularly, they would thereby attract enough publishable manuscripts. When the journals are sustainable, many international indexing and abstracting agencies would be interested in covering the journals and therefore authors would gain the recognition and visibility they desire.

It is also expected that editors, business managers and editorial board members would undertake training courses regularly on the management of journals. It is hoped that the newly formed West African Association of Journal of LIS Editors (WALISJE) would play a prominent role in this regard.

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## Appendix: List of journals surveyed

Ghana Library Journal, 1963-  
Nigerian Libraries, 1964-

Lagos Librarian, 1971 -  
Nigerian School Library Journal, 1978 -  
Nigeria Library and Information Science Review, 1982 -  
Library Focus, 1983 -  
African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science, 1991 -  
Gateway Library Journal, 1998 -  
Journal of the Association of Libraries for the Visually Handicapped, 1999 -  
Journal of Librarianship and Information Science in Africa (IFLA), 1999 -  
Middle Belt Library Journal, 2001 -  
Trends in Library and Information Science: Journal of the Imo State Chapter of the Nigerian Library Association, 2001 -  
Borno Library, Archival and Information Science Journal, 2002 -