

Book Reviews

Library and information science text for Africa

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Ibadan: Third World Information Services Ltd; 365p.

ISBN: 978 32836 1 8

Price: Unknown

Scarcity of relevant texts in and about Africa can pose a serious handicap to learners and instructors on the continent. For academics to publish works that provide basic text for African library and information science trainees and practitioners is commendable, not only for filling a scarcity in the literature, but also in the imparting of skills applicable to Africa.

The author is a scholar whose experience in teaching library and information science in the African setting, spans more than twenty-five years and was influenced by expressed needs.

From the title, three key terms are highlighted, namely "science", "text" and "Africa". Librarianship is treated as a science, a distinct branch of knowledge that is studied and acquired on principles involving the systematised observation of phenomena'. A "text" is a record of work written for the purpose of imparting a specific piece of knowledge to be taught in a learning situation, especially in a classroom.

How is the "text" made applicable to the "practitioner"? In this case, practicing librarians in Southern Africa may want to ensure that the type of curriculum or course content offered in library schools in Africa, equip students with practical skills that match demands required in the field. The book focuses also on Southern Africa, and specifically, Botswana, from where the author originates.

The book constitutes twenty chapters. The first three are an overview of the history, services, and the development of the library and information profession. What follows is a discussion on the essence of the profession and those who form part of the profession in their distinctive roles: librarians, archivists, information scientists, database managers, and curators.

The third chapter dwells on types of library and information services, their various clients, and how they are provided for. Unavoidably, references to the evolution of the information profession touches on the rest of the world, possibly losing the expected focus on Africa.

The book gives concise summaries of the scenarios in Africa. On their own, the summaries are intended to educate a student on the diverse history and development of library services in Africa. For example, the text outlines role of the locally-made papyrus as a medium of conveying information in ancient Egypt. It is further stated that advanced libraries of other Islamic countries in Africa have influenced the beginning of libraries in Europe. The earliest libraries established in Southern Africa were public libraries for the whites in Rhodesia and South Africa. This African diversity, which depicts a comparatively belated growth south of the Sahara, tallies with testimonies compiled by Michael Wise (1985) in *Aspects of African Librarianship: A collection of writings*.

With regard to the book's focus on Africa, the author states that the "examples quoted in this book largely reflect the African reality". However, most of the examples are taken from Botswana and Nigeria.

Chapters Four and Five focus on who needs information, the library users, and the type of information acquired, collected and handled by library and information professionals. The wide range of information "carriers" (or sources) enumerated illustrates the various formats found in a library, and how to handle them. It is these sources of information that librarians as professionals collect, and organise for use in library collections. The description of these "carriers" leads to the core message of the book, namely, the listing, cataloguing, bibliographic description and subject organisation of information sources.

The main thrust of the book can be found in Chapters Six to Fourteen, which constitute 45 % of the entire text, namely, *organisation of information*. Cataloguing and classification, the author's specialty, is covered in detail in the book. Subsequent to each introduction of an international code or a classification scheme, such as the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, the origins and principles and the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, its structure and design, the text sets out the principle steps of the cataloguing and classifying procedures. Although briefly mentioning the other

classification schemes, the author mentions that the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme is most frequently used in Africa.

However, the author highlights problems of applying these internationally adopted codes, which at times do not accommodate peculiarities of local situations. A practitioner's observation is that there are supplementary manuals in most of the African libraries where home-grown schedules are constructed to supplement the traditionally used codes that are so religiously taught and studied. Local improvisation may be said to weaken global standardisation. Yet, without those local innovative supplements, organising information related to African languages, places and names, becomes inadequate. The author is commended for advocating Cataloguing-in-Publications. A pertinent question could be posed to students on their experiences with the deficiencies of the international cataloguing codes and/or classification schemes. The author provides questions at the end of each chapter, as a guide for student revision.

Chapter Fourteen covers the abstracting and indexing of library materials. The essence of Indexes, Abstracts, Lists, Bibliographies and all the tools of current awareness services (CAS), is to reach users, and they are also used to alert clients about what is available in the libraries. Thus the functions of subject headings, thesauri, descriptors are briefly described in this respect.

Chapters Fifteen to Nineteen are devoted to the "forward-looking" activities of librarians. They are collection development, management of library and information services, management of routine library tasks, and the basics of information technology.

Lastly, Chapter Twenty discusses how to conduct research. Firstly, the author asserts that for the discipline to grow, it must have its practical problems empirically researched so that solutions may be found. Again, basic principles of research are outlined, while at the same time the text raises issues pertaining to library science in Africa.

In summary, the strength of any text lies in its readability, and more so this one, which is quite valuable, primarily to students, and also to lecturers in library and information science. However, excessive use of abbreviations, such as "etc"., disrupt the smooth flow of the text.

Apart from its use as a student text, the book makes challenging reading to librarians in the field. It may be useful in the induction of new staff in the cataloguing and classification departments of a library, and as a training tool for library managers.

Library and information science text for Africa is a unique work. It is an intellectual achievement that will be valuable in the library schools and libraries of our region.

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