

Ethical Issues in Library and Information Science Profession in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Library and information science professional play an extremely important role in the society. However, in discharging their responsibilities and duties, core ethical principles are expected to be upheld by librarians and information workers as outlined in the professional codes of ethics. The aim of this paper is to appraise core ethical issues in library and information science profession in Nigeria. This paper discusses core ethical principle in library and information science profession such as universal access to information, intellectual property rights, intellectual freedom, copyright/fair use and privacy/confidentiality among others. This paper further identified ethical challenges confronting library and information science professionals in Nigeria. This paper concludes that regardless of the ethical challenges confronting library and information science professionals in Nigeria, the professional codes of ethics should be upheld.

KEYWORDS

Code of Ethics, Conduct and Professional, Ethical Challenge, Ethics, Information Science Professionals, Library, Professional Code

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INTRODUCTION

Library and information science professionals play an extremely important role in the society due to their different capabilities in handling diverse information materials in a way that benefits everyone. However, in rendering quality services to the public, library and information professionals are expected to imbibe values such as honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability respectfulness, fairness, equity and justice (ALA, 2009; Rublin & Froehlich, 2011). Apart from this, a demonstration of sound ethical knowledge and practice is a sine qua non for library and information science professionals.

Quite a number of Professional bodies and associations have defined their ethical approaches comprising of several discrete components (Whitebeck, 1998). However, in the library and information science profession, professional bodies and associations, both locally and internationally have their ethical principles and values. These professional bodies and associations include: America Library Association (ALA), International Federation of Library Association (IFLA), Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Library bill of Right and Nigeria Library Association (NLA) among others.

The core ethical principles emphasized by these professional bodies and associations include intellectual freedom, equitable access to information, information privacy and intellectual property rights (Falis, 2005). These ethical principles are fundamental to the practice of librarianship and information science in Nigeria. It guides the library and information professionals in discharging their ethical responsibilities to the public. Library and information science professionals in Nigeria are guided by the code of conduct for librarians as specified in the Nigeria's Library Association and other professional bodies such as IFLA and ALA respectively (ALA, 2009). However, there are slight differences in the ethical principles of these associations and professional bodies. For instance, it was observed by Koehler, Hurych, Dole and Wall, (2000) that although there are differences in the ethical principles of library associations and professional bodies, however there is fairly wide agreement about what the principles are. For instance, principles of intellectual freedom and censorship, protection of users' right to privacy and confidentiality and recognition of intellectual property rights are upheld in librarianship and information science profession (ALA, 2009). In the same vein, Mbofung and Popoola (2014) submitted that ethical standards may be universal but are not absolute; rather it may be subjected to modification whenever the need arises.

Based on the importance of ethical standards and principles in the practice of librarianship and other allied profession, the aim of this paper is to discuss core ethical issues in library and information science profession in Nigeria; identify the ethical challenges encountered by library and information science professionals in Nigeria in discharging their roles; and suggests ways of combating these challenges. In view of this, the layout of this paper will cover the following sub-topics: concept of ethics/professional ethics, and purposes of librarians' code of ethics. It will further delve into core ethical concerns in library and information science profession as it relates to the Nigerian environment, ethical challenges encountered by library and information science professionals in Nigeria will also be discussed. Furthermore, this paper will suggest ways of addressing these ethical challenges and lastly, policy interventions, recommendations and conclusion will be made.

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