

Repositioning library and information science curriculum for enhanced oral tradition knowledge management education in Nigeria: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-DLIS experience

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Abstract:

Traditional knowledge (TK) variously termed indigenous knowledge (IK), cultural heritage or oral tradition have been applied in our daily activities to make positive socioeconomic contributions in agriculture, healthcare, medicine, food preservation, recreation, technology, culture in rural and urban communities. The burden of loss of traditional knowledge stored in the memory of elders as they die is high while LIS training is inadequate to handle this challenge. It has become critical to initiate Oral History Research (OHR) perspective for TK management in the LIS curriculum education of librarians. OHR is deemed the most effective tool for collecting, preserving and transmitting past experiences. This paper reviews LIS curriculum for integrating OHR techniques to enable LIS learners in HEIs share experiences and best practices in cultural heritage management in Nigeria. The paper is a case study which adopted a qualitative research methodology. Participant observation and document analysis of curricular and students' projects were data collection instruments. A major finding was the absence of OHR in the LIS curriculum. Educators are aware of the responsibility to incorporate a range of learning experiences that equip the professionals with skills that are in line with international best practices. Suggested undergraduate curriculum-based course for OHR should include: introduction to OHR, methodology, types of OHR projects, selection and use of equipment, interview and recording of programmes. The paper concludes that teaching of OHR as a unit of the existing oral tradition course or as a stand-alone credit earning course in training prospective workforce is crucial for enhanced development, execution, and promotion of TK management in the era of pervasive mobile and digital technological influences in librarianship.

Keywords: *Traditional Knowledge Management, Cultural heritage, Oral history research, LIS curriculum, Nnamdi Azikiwe University.*

Introduction

A great part of the current human knowledge which occurs in several spheres is still conveyed through non written means, one of the most interesting and important is the one labelled as traditional knowledge or oral tradition (OT). It is made up of spoken knowledge that is transmitted through oral channels but forms the foundations of many individuals or collective identities of cultures around the world including those of rural and modern urban based societies .OT preserves the records of the past and continues to be the dominant form of human communication and knowledge transmission in the 21st century. Although it can evidently benefit from being documented and archived. It is a living tradition maintained by collective memory and perpetrated by societies. Civallero (2017)defined oral tradition as the corpus of selected knowledge communally curated and transmitted from generation to generation usually by oral means and using well defined forms; it collects what a human group- no matter its size ,composition and structure-has deemed necessary or important to preserve ,codify and perpetuate.

Generally speaking, this type of knowledge forms the basic culture of an individual or a community. According to Civallero OT provides the cultural map and the roots of our heritage which to a great extent makes us who we are. It is not limited to societies lacking reading or writing skills. It is also present among literate societies. There are few branches of human activity, regardless of their size that is not associated with an oral corpus. In contemporary urban communities, oral tradition has a strong presence, especially amongst social groups (minority, disadvantaged, dissidents, alternative groups) who for whatever reasons have not seen their opinions and memories fixed in writing .It throws light on the historical, economic and cultural developments of communities, serving as the only way in which the past could be reconstructed and recorded for preservation

What constitutes traditional corpus are as varied as the communities which own them. They include shared values ,teachings and experiences transmitted during the first stages of socialization, the concept of family , customary treatment and respect given to strangers ,basic rules of behaviour , games, songs, a piece of music, food, culinary skills and delicacies, beliefs ,oral literature -legends ,folk stories, epic ,proverbs , cultural expressions such as theatre or dance, myths of creation and destruction, ecosystems, communities' unwritten historical and pseudo-historical narratives, family/community anecdotes, genealogy , taboos and non-written laws, indigenous or local knowledge on Health, medicine, agriculture, technology, recreation, culture, games, crafts, activities, historical sites, persons and events, general guidelines about the natural and social universe, the social fabric of a community, knowledge about a medicinal plant or animal, a local technology or a product.

Oral tradition is not confined to just spoken words. Civallero (2017) further explained that they are also expressed in constituents of textile, facial paintings, tattoos and body adornments, baskets, designs on ceramics and gourds, carvings, sculptures, pottery photographs, painting and drawings .Other details are found in books, magazines ,journals, newspapers ,letters and other written, printed documents and digitized or electronic formats. Oral tradition is also expressed in fossilized forms. The contents are practically infinite. All these contents are pieces of our memory, history, essence, parts of us as persons, members of a society and inhabitant of a certain place. Oral tradition keeps alive family memories, local histories, individual or group experiences related to number of historical events and traditions. Besides keeping the threads (records) of the social fabric together, it supplement and

balance the “official history”. However, OT has the potential of being lost as the custodians die and are buried with these knowledge.

The great threat to the survival of communities promotes Oral history. Oral history research (OHR) offers an integral perspective of the research technique for documentation and preservation of the past experiences in lieu of future dissemination. OHR facilitates cultural heritage preservation which is crucial in positioning any community’s presence in the memory of the world. Williams(2010) views oral history (fieldwork, cultural documentation) as a method of recording the memory and personal commentary from knowledgeable individuals (often called traditional bearers and community scholars)in other to document a historical event, group, tradition, occupation, avocation, attitude.

Rajkoomer (2012) observed that whether the cultural record emanating from oral history is contained in books or in electronic formats, libraries ensure that the valuable records of cultures are preserved and made available for later use by succeeding generations, linking the past, present and future .As public institutions , memory archives hosting cultural heritage of humankind, unlike archives; they provide and guarantee equal access to strategic oral resource, support literacy and education for all citizens. Libraries are part of the communities they serve, they respond to their needs by their various collections, programs, projects and activities. The purpose of libraries in recent times is becoming multifaceted. Leheman (2011) remarked that the future of library will be as a knowledge centre that is dynamic, where only the librarian, the books (whether real or virtual) and the users engage in an interchange of ideas.

The library which is the custodian of all types of knowledge including cultural heritage has witnessed a paradigm shift from traditional information handling methodologies to technological platforms. This has affected the creation, documentation, organization, dissemination and services associated with OT. Cultural knowledge is increasing in importance in the political, social and economic spheres of communities .Promoting the documentation and dissemination of oral traditional knowledge for future utilization has become critical. Abdulsalami et al (2013) confirmed that the basic aim of establishing libraries and other information organizations in modern societies is to be able to respond to the information needs of communities and for the libraries to function well in the society there is need to plan for sustainable documentation and preservation of the cultural heritage. There is need to craft OT into storable formats that can be made available for use in traditional and electronic platforms. The creation of these non-convictional sources is part of an on -going dynamic process which must essentially be achieved through the curriculum for training librarians.

THE LIS CURRICULUM AND ORAL TRADITION KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA

The content of the curriculum projects what knowledge is considered important and valid.(Ngulube, Dube& Mhlongo). It has become critical to enhance Oral Tradition Management (OTM) through the training and education of librarians by integrating OHR into the LIS curriculum in Nigeria. This will allow librarians to be taught the techniques of creating the records from elders who are facilitators, co-learners and co-constructors of meaning in line with the indigenous ways of learning reflected in the “problem- solving” pedagogy(Freire cited in Ngulube, Dube &Mhlongo,2015). There is fear that most of our cultural knowledge, especially African languages are endangered. UNESCO (2012) predicted that the Igbo language will become extinct in the year 2025. Considering emerging trends, there is need to train the professionals who will be able to articulate and record the needed oral tradition resources to meet the future cultural and historical information needs of their communities. A curriculum which is mediated by culture and social context with indigenous theoretical foundations is likely to be responsive to the cultural problems facing the communities in Nigeria .The first step in the on-going process as suggested by Civallero (2017) is most importantly how the oral records are created. There is increasing need to cater for the threat facing traditional knowledge through training librarians as stake holders in its preservation.

OT has been an integral part of the LIS curriculum in Nigerian universities (Hundu & Anaele, n.d). However, oral history which is the aspect that is concerned with recording past accounts by culturally sanctioned tradition bearers is significantly missing in the oral tradition course content in the

universities in Nigeria, yet the students go on field work. This applies to the department of LIS, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (DLIS), NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY

Department of library and information science(DLIS)as an academic discipline started in the then Anambra state university of science and technology (ASUTECH) in 1986.The academic program was a B.ED program ,a sub unit of the department of Educational Foundation for upgrading Nigerian certificate for education (NCE) and University of Ibadan diploma graduates who combined library science appointments with a teaching subject such as human kinetics, health education , political science, economics and English .This foundation paved a way for the curriculum which consisted of three parts-core education courses, librarianship, and teaching courses. Over time it was discovered that the program was meeting only the needs of school libraries because of its restrictive contents. Consequent upon the promulgation of the Librarians' Registration Council Decree, the pressure mounted by the NUC and the empowerment from the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the B.ED program was dropped and the Bachelor of library and information science (BLIS) was institutionalized in its place .By the year 2005, the academic program was granted departmental status by the Senate of the university. Presently, the department offers programs in LIS for postgraduate diploma, Master's Degree in LIS (MLIS) and Ph.D. in LIS.

Among the objective of the department's academic program is to produce graduates who are competent, value oriented and dedicated to serve as catalyst for development and societal change (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2019).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most of the traditional knowledge are stored in the memory of our elders who are the custodians. Yet not a day passes by without an elderly man or woman dying with their wealth of knowledge which is lost and buried beyond recovery. The burden of loss of traditional knowledge in developing countries is high while the training of LIS students with this curriculum is inadequate to meet the challenges posed by endangerment and attrition of traditional knowledge. The LIS curriculum made provision for the course LIS 203: Oral tradition, culture, literature and libraries. However, from observation and practice of one of the researchers who have taught the course for over ten years, it has been discovered that the course content did not include oral history. However, the students embark on the fieldwork without learning the techniques of cultural heritage documentation.

Oral history is generally excluded from the course content in most lis curricular reviewed by the researchers with no replacement. Consequently the LIS professionals lack the propensity for recording the history which is at the core of documentation, preservation and library service delivery for OTM. There is need therefore, to identify the components of oral history to be integrated into the Oral tradition curriculum in Nigerian universities to reposition the professionals to acquire the requisite oral history skills and knowledge. Therefore, the work sets out to provide insight for the optimizing OHR techniques to enable LIS trainees, benefit in sharing of experiences and best practices in cultural heritage management.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The general objective of the study is to identify omissions in the oral tradition curriculum of DLIS, Nnamdi Azikiwe University ,specifically it sets to: i. Review the LIS curriculum and course content of LIS 203: oral tradition, culture, literature and libraries. ii. Highlight the items of oral history research that will be integrated into the LIS curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study research design. The method of data collection is participant observation and document analysis of the department's handbook, oral history project of DLIS students, LIS curriculum of SLIS Simmons University (from a developed country purposely selected because of its rich curriculum content in OTM). Literature review and the shared experiences with the researcher and the students offering LIS over the ten years of teaching the course as well as the feedback they gave for promoting improved oral history research practices formed source of data for the study. The method of data analysis is qualitative and are presented in line with the objectives of study.

PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND FINDINGS

OBJECTIVE I: REVIEW OF COURSE CONTENT OF LIS 203

The LIS curriculum of DLIS has only LIS 203: TRADITION, CULTURE, and LITERATURE AND LIBRARIES covering oral tradition. In line with objective i, the researcher tried to review the course content of this core LIS course which includes the following units. i. Definition and values of oral information and literature. ii. Oral knowledge of the history and culture of a people. iii. Oral literature as source materials for research. iv. Identifying and recording relevant sources. v. Role of libraries in collection, transcription, documentation, organization, or oral tradition resources. vi. Problems of preservation, storage and retrieval of oral tradition resources. (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2015).

A cursory analysis into the course contents of oral tradition, revealed that unit **iv** in the course outline provided for identifying and recording relevant sources, while there was an outright omission of a unit for the learning experience for the students to learn the techniques of carrying out the recording a relevant source. The students may be able to identify the sources because units i-iii have provided adequate learning experiences that expose the students to the basic concepts of oral tradition, indigenous knowledge, oral communication, cultural heritage, oral literature as source materials and its genres, their constituents, formats; oral knowledge of the history and culture of a people. These corroborate constituents itemized by Civallero (2017).

This omission is highlighted in the works of other scholars such as Moahi (2012) Mabota, Ngulube and Wutete (2013) who revealed that the integration of IK into the curriculum at universities in Africa was limited and superficial, making it difficult for IK to play a significant part in pedagogic and development discourse in Africa. This is also in line with the observation of Civallero (2017) who regretted that unfortunately, there is no specific LIS oriented training, guidelines or recommendation. Librarians willing to deal with oral tradition might have to reframe their own concepts, tools and techniques or create new ones from an interdisciplinary perspective.

However, contrary to this provision, Simmons University, SLIS curriculum includes LIS 423: storytelling, LIS 432: concepts in cultural heritage informatics and LIS 433: oral history as courses collectively provided for developing the oral tradition knowledge and skills of prospective library practitioners. LIS 423 examines cultural origins and contemporary practices in storytelling. LIS 432 is a course that serves as a foundation course for students who seek careers as information in archives, museums, libraries and other heritage settings while LIS 433 is a course in three components 1. Studying the ethics and responsible practices of oral history, 2. Developing a projected document of a life, event, occupation, family, institution or experience. 3. Archiving, providing access and preserving audio-visual recordings. Students are required to secure a recording device to perform oral history interviews and also learn to use audio-visual editing software (Simmons university, 2019).

A comparison of the provisions of the two curriculum sifts out the discrepancies and inadequacies in the DLIS curriculum of UNIZIK, and the SLIS, Simmons university from a developed economy, with respect to education and training in traditional knowledge management especially in the present

dispensation of the knowledge economy where the emphasis is on content, creation, distribution and use of knowledge in society. In this dispensation, acceptable option is to ensure that cultural knowledge; which had provided sustainable livelihoods for our communities must be essentially documented and preserved for global access in line with SDGs. Integration of oral history research would prepare the grounds for the learning experience of **unit v: role of libraries in collection, transcription and documentation, organization for use in the library** because libraries can make available and accessible only documented resources to users with a complement of services .

Civallero (2017) reiterated that designing and developing library activities related to oral tradition: from the production of e-books on local history to the creation of online oral collections, of open software and cloud storage, of distribution through certain networks and platforms, of videos, images and recordings accompanied with explanations, all are ways of allowing other people to get to know community cultural expressions. The justification for inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the LIS curriculum was confirmed by Dei (2008) and Chisita and Abdulahi (2010) who urged LIS educators to include it in the curriculum in order to equip LIS students with skills and knowledge to organize and integrate IK with western knowledge as well as serve as another way of implicitly preserving it.

OBJECTIVE TWO: HIGHLIGHT OF ORAL HISTORY ITEMS TO BE INTEGRATED IN THE CURRICULUM

Curriculum based teaching for oral history research for undergraduates in Nigeria would serve as a powerful learning strategy for preserving cultural heritage. Several oral history items that were gleaned from literature and feedback from interaction with students formed part of the items found desirable to be included in the curriculum. The items could collectively stand alone as an additional course as is applicable in most LIS curriculum of library schools in developed countries (Simmons University, 2019) or incorporated as a unit of the oral tradition course content in DLIS (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2019).

From the experience the researcher shared with the students who undertook the oral history documentation and understudy of their projects, the following thematic options emerged: i. they need to be grounded in oral history technique ii. They need to be taught the themes for documentation project. iii. They should be taught how to conduct the documentation project. iv. Exposed to the different formats in which the documents could occur .v. Equipment needed for the operation and their manipulation .vi. Some hinted that they would like to be exposed to knowledge on how to use ICTs in the documentation project .Within the last two sessions, the students reported that they wished they could be briefed on how to relate with the resource persons who often times are elderly. All these expectations resonated issues dealing with OHR and the process of creating the traditional knowledge into storable records .These reflect inadequate knowledge of the methodology of the project they embarked on. Roy (1994) had appealed that oral history should be incorporated in the curriculum to involve students so that they can become acquainted with the methodology.

On the areas to be included in the learning experience Roy advocated that the concept of oral history, oral history techniques, initiating and directing the program, training students on skills involved in conducting background research, formulating appropriate questions, handling equipment, conducting interviews, indexing or transcribing completed interviews and editing. Curriculum could feature training that includes preparing packets of background material on oral history, developing model interviews, Use of video tapes CD-ROMs, digital cameras. Active oral history project may involve students in certain stages of the program especially in interviewing. Organizing workshop or practicums by experienced librarians or oral historians.

William (2016) suggested that in planning OHR best practices, ethics, research topics, project plan, question preparation, ethics forms, equipment know-how and parts should be considered as items for inclusion. He advised that in the course unit on conducting the interview ,processes to follow such as interview styles , types of verbal/nonverbal responses, reading interviewees' facial and body

expressions ,allowing for silence(inner dialogue, difficult memories, working to recall specifics),how to begin interview, equipment set up ,microphone placement ,sound check , creating a log for the interview records(how it went ,problems, follow up questions),sending thank you letter/email, explain draft of transcript for review management ,method of interview transcription, transcript vetting, effect suggested edits to script ,schedule follow-up interview, deposit interview material to reputable repository. The researcher in line with the theme on relationship highlighted by the students noted that excellent oral history endeavours begin with thoughtful, preparation, impeccable ethics and community partners, being principled and honest without trespassing on culture. Agreeing with this assertion, the Baylor University Institute for oral history (2016) insinuates that aspects of ethical relationships, legal documents and copyright are also to be covered in the curriculum.

On the hand media for the preservation of the content is very important. Harhai, Krueger and Maccaferri (2017) emphasized the inclusion of the use of digital devices to create, store, preserve, access and share traditional knowledge through thematic activities, creating digital oral histories as a multipurpose project that incorporates fundamental literacy skills with community engagement will develop local digital standards .It will benefit students if lis educators could acquaint students with learning experiences in the use of digital audio recorders , mini DV cassettes, CDs, DVDs, SD cards ,audio video, mobile devices, streaming video websites, web conferencing programs recording, up loaded recordings to repositories of public libraries or academic libraries' institutional repositories should be covered .

CONCLUSION

Holistic oral history research preserves a communities history (Showren, 2013). LIS professionals as stakeholders in the collection, preservation, documentation and dissemination of information, including cultural heritage knowledge need to be grounded in the creation of records of these critical knowledge base. OHR is indispensable in the knowledge economy where librarians' knowledge management skills are challenged. Incorporating oral history as a stand-alone credit earning course or as a unit in the existing oral tradition course in the LIS curriculum is the only guaranteed way by which libraries can have trained librarians who will provide strategic oral resources in various formats to serve its users in public and academic libraries that have the mandate to provide cultural and community resources. If adopted the emerging curriculum will strategically improve the LIS practitioners' ability and reposition them for efficient cultural knowledge management to harness, create documents and disseminate the cultural heritage of Nigeria.

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