

**GLOBAL COMMUNICATION/EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND
SKILLS DEVELOPMENTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CASE
STUDY OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA.**

BY

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Abstract

This article examines the relevance of training and skills development to modern librarianship in the first generation universities in Nigeria. The developments noticed in this sector in the universities within the past decade made it imperative to have new workers with new skills to adopt to the many changes that have taken place that are likely to affect the working environments and professional functions of the librarians.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. 80 librarians made up of (twenty eight) 28 professional librarians and 52 Para-professional librarians participated in the study. Data were collected using a questionnaire tagged Workers Skills Development Questionnaire (WSDQ) and this was complemented with structured interview.

Findings revealed that librarians should be trained to cope with global change in librarianship. Specific areas where skills need to be enhanced were identified and suggestions for sources of fund were described.

Introduction

The nature of library resources has transformed from the normal collections we used to know into electronic format. Clients' demands have also changed from asking for sources of information to demanding real information. These inevitable and unabatable changes eroding traditional librarianship practices have placed a demand for capacity building on libraries and librarians.

The field of librarianship is witnessing so much development and transformations that any library that is not in tune will become obsolete in no time. The idea of interlibrary loans and dependency, for instance is not strange in the librarianship circle. The dimension through which it is integrated into library practice currently in the developed world can not be ignored. It is no longer considered merely a convenient arrangement. It is structural and participatory, and the governments (in public-owned institutions) take keen interest in the arrangement plus making grants available for its smooth implementation. If you need an item that is not available in your institution's library, you simply get the item within reasonable length of time by a click of appropriate keys through special delivery system. An example of such consortia arrangement is 'I-Share' system, which includes the resources of 65 Illinois libraries belonging to 'Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI webpage).

The responsibilities taken for the promotion of library services by certain bodies known as the 'Friends of the Library' may seem adjunct but it is germane to the well-being of the of a library if it must perform and be responsive to users' needs in a society where all social programs compete for funds and attention from government. In Nigeria, this group, which is becoming phenomenal all over in the present day library community, is very novel.

These trends are regarded as ‘best practices’ now for improving library functions and services and they are merely contingent to the core technical and professional practices of selecting, acquiring, organizing and disseminating materials. More challenging is the need to train in sourcing, acquiring, preserving and making available electronic resources. Presently, the idea of audio books may seem strange but it is generating a lot of discourse in higher educational institution. Librarians must be ready to embrace this new medium of communicating knowledge.

Libraries exist to give service. It is either they do this or they become irrelevant. To continue to be relevant, conscious efforts should be made for training and retraining library staff.

In recent years, many socio economic changes have affected the funding of public universities in Nigeria and consequently their libraries. These changes have effect on the training of professional librarians who seriously need to the face the challenges posed by the accelerating pace of change in the world of communication.

Inadequacy of funds is considered universal and pervasive in libraries regardless of type, status or location. However, some libraries suffer debilitating neglect than others. This is particularly serious in developing countries where there are constant economic problems which manifest in unemployment, poverty and shoestring budgetary allocation.

Consequently, national priorities dictate the sectors of the economy that are given budgetary attention. Publicly funded university libraries in Nigeria are bedeviled by financial constraints. This is particularly so because the Education Sector is not given the prime place it deserves in the national annual budget. Since the Universities are poorly funded, it is common knowledge that when there is reduction in budgetary allocations, the libraries are the first to suffer cuts in their allocations. (Ola, 1995).

In alluding to the financial constraints experienced by Nigerian Universities, Ola (2005) informs “In Nigeria, education... suffers greatly despite persistent agitations by the general public that the sub-sector should be adequately funded.” He further stated that libraries are so poorly funded that they cannot even afford to subscribe to journals and other periodicals. Moreover, libraries are at the mercies of their principals. Even when subventions are released by government to Universities, the ten percent (10%) of recurrent expenditure that should statutorily be made available for library use is manipulated by university administration and oftentimes, the fund is diverted to other uses. Since , in most cases, the University Librarian (who head the libraries) are not a signatories to library accounts, the funds would have been long expended for other things before the libraries get to know. Under such circumstances as this, there are hardly any thoughts given to training and capacity building!

The needs of library users continue to expand everyday due to emergence of new frontiers of research. The only way to keep users satisfied and sustain their confidence in the libraries is through efficient training of the librarians.

Statement of the Problem

There is a major transformation in the libraries in Nigeria from manual (traditional) librarianship to the electronic (modern) format of information service delivery occasioned by the changing frontiers of learning and research in the world. For instance, libraries have to respond to demands of wider outreach through distance learning. Many libraries now have to use new method like On-line Public Access

Catalogue (OPAC), the Internet and multi-media electronic communications systems to widen their outreach which requires special and new kinds of expertise both on the part of the librarians and the library users. The new changes are coming in the face of dwindling economic resources in the universities and hence their libraries. There is therefore the need to sensitize the librarians on the need for training to cope with these changes. Against this background, this study aims to identify specific areas where the skills of the university librarians need to be developed as a response to the identified changes in the public University Libraries in Nigeria.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The instruments used for data collection were: a set of questionnaire tagged Workers Skills Development Questionnaire (WSDQ) and a self structured interview. The items contained in the instruments were used to elicit information on specific areas of skills development needs and possible environmental factors that may hinder skills development. Five First Generation Universities participated in the study. The first generation universities and their years of establishment listed below.

1. University of Ibadan (South West, Nigeria) 1948
2. University of Nigeria, Nsuka (South East, Nigeria) 1960
3. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (North Central, Nigeria) 1962
4. University of Lagos (South West, Nigeria) 1962
5. University of Ife (South West, Nigeria) 1962

There are three categories of staff identified by the researcher, they are:

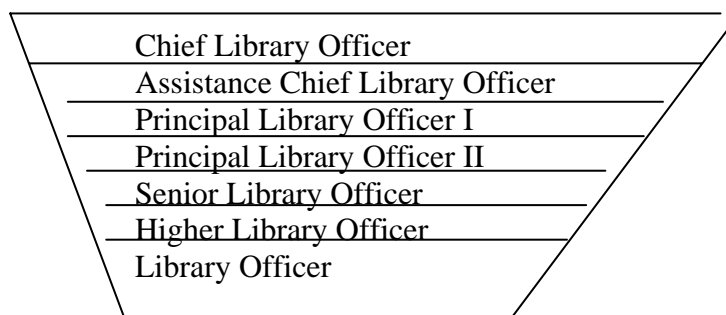
1. Support Staff: The clerical, secretariat and security staff
2. Para-professional staff. The library officers, the staff in this category generally rose through the ranks. They hold diploma in the library science, a first degree in library science or other related disciplines. They constitute the main body of library staff and cannot rise higher than the level of a chief library officer.
3. The professional library staff. They are the smallest in numerical terms and hold a minimum qualification of a masters degree.

Only the last two categories i.e. the Para professional and professional librarians took part in the study.

Hierarchy of Professional and Para-Professional Library Nigeria

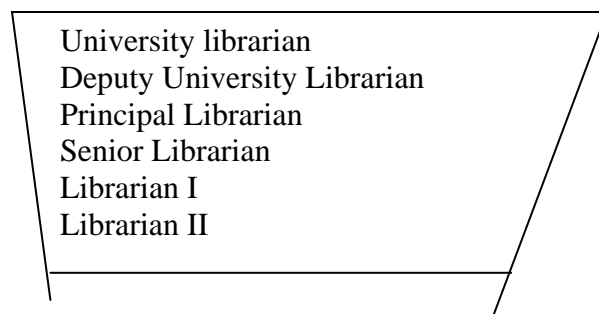
The hierarchy of ranking of Para-professional and professional librarians and presented below.

A. Para-professional librarians



The hierarchy above was found in four of the universities sampled. The University of Ibadan is yet to split the position of principal library officer into two.

B. The professional librarians



Professional librarians are categorized as Academic librarians and are in fact member of Academic staff Union of University (ASUU). The position of University librarian is occupied by appointment for two terms of five years each. Only very few employees get to the level of Deputy and University librarians,

Identification of Training Needs

Training becomes useful only when it is directional. It is expected to attempt to correct an identified problem in the organization. Considering the huge cost of training to an organization, it should be given where it is really needed. Training is the use of scarce financial resources for the betterment of the equally scarce human resources. Therefore the identification of training needs should precede any training activity.

Boydell & Leary (1999) describe their idea of training needs as existing any time an actual condition differs from a desired condition in the human or “people” aspect of organization performance or more specifically when a change in present human knowledge, skills or attitudes can bring about the desired performance. Ingwu (1987) also describes training need as the recognition of an unusual or abnormal condition that requires correction.

Nti (1974) identifies five fields in which training needs must be analyzed as follows.

- i. Training new employees (orientation, induction training etc)
- ii. Training present employees for increase work effectiveness
- iii. Training outstanding employees for promotion and filling of vacancies.
- iv. Executive training
- v. Attitude

There is also the need for training need assessment in the organization in the following areas:

- Training needs resulting from changes in legislation;

- Changes in needed skills or procedures because of new technologies (e.g. introducing electronic system into librarianship);
- Improvement of existing skills to enhance productivity and boost levels of services;
- Acquisition of new skills necessary for prompting workers in their new jobs or for introducing changes in the division of labour within administrative units;
- Continuous updating and professional fulfillment of employees whose specially areas are known to undergo rapid and significant changes;
- Imparting necessary skills for new employees so that they can perform in the new environment;
- Organizational growth in terms of efficiency and effectiveness from improved management techniques;
- Increased responsiveness to present service needs and anticipation of the future public needs; and
- Improvement skills and personal growth of all government officials

The Research Questions

The study was carried out based on the following research questions.

1. Are there significant relationship between the ability of the Librarian to cope with the Global changes and the following components of skills development?
 - a. Functional flexibility skills
 - b. Adaptability skills
 - c. Developmental Skill
 - d. Influencing skills
2. What are the relative contributions of each of the skills development components to the Librarians ability to cope with the changes?
4. What are the operational problems involved or encountered in the use of the skills development packages?

Findings

Table 1: Contingency table for testing the relationship of functional flexibility skills, adaptability skills, developmental skills and influencing skills on the Librarians ability to cope with the global changes.

| | DF | Sum of squares | Mean square | F-Ratio | P | Remarks |
|------------|----|----------------|-------------|----------|--------|---------|
| Regression | 9 | 1.10951 | 0.27738 | 8710.993 | 0.0000 | Sig |
| Residual | 71 | 0.01576 | 0.00003 | | | |

F-ratio = 8710.993; Significant of F = 0.0000; $p < 0.05$

From the table, $F(9,71) = 8710$; $p < 0.05$. This means that employees' skills do have a significant relationship with the ability of the Librarians to cope with the demand of global development in librarianship. The various skills identified are; Functional flexibility skills (ability to function in different capacities), adaptability skills which is the ability to cope successfully with the on the job demands (coping mechanism) while development skills are meant to engender innovation and improvisation abilities as the

occasion demands to achieve set goals and objectives. Influencing skills connotes being relevant positively to the environment(s) of operation whether domestic or global (international). It must be understood that these skills dimensions are interdependent and contingent which means that all together, they are the desired skills in the workers (employees) to bring about productivity.

Table II:

Contingency table testing the relative contributions of the skills to the coping abilities of the Librarians.

| Variables | Beta(β) | T |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Functional flexibility skills | 0.176276 | 14.882 |
| Adaptability skills | 0.318119 | 28.787 |
| Developmental Skills | 0.293707 | 17.0.13 |
| Influencing skills | 0.258457 | 14.191 |

The analysis of the relative contributions of each of the skills re-engineering components to employees' productivity show adaptability skills ranking first with 0.318119 followed by developmental skills with 0.293707. The next in line is influencing skills which is 0.258457 and then functional flexibility skills with 0.176276.

The respondents believe that Adaptability skills have the highest relative contribution because there is a great need for the Librarians to cope with the new trends in the face of dwindling financial resources.

4. What are the operational problems involved or encountered in the use of the skills development packages?

The operational problems identified and mentioned by the respondent were inadequate finance to train and educate the workers, inadequate appropriate infrastructural facilities and facilitators who were to carry out the re-skilling programmes. Also, a conducive environmental condition to carry out the programme were not available as they are supposed to be.

All the respondents agree that the greatest impediment to training is funding. In all the five universities sampled, majority (85%) want to rely on subvention from the center for staff training. The library projects in the University of Ibadan have been enjoying sponsorship from grants obtained from the MAC-ARTHUR FOUNDATION. Some professional librarians have been assisted through this to go for overseas training to improve their competence. The internally fund generating units are not very active in all the universities hence, the funds from these sources cannot be sufficient for training. One respondent reported that he is going to Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville in the U.S to understudy (among other things) a funding body called '**Friends of the Library.**'

This is a project in which some recognized patrons "friends" donate and carry out projects towards the development of the library. The aim is to study how such projects can be implemented in the University Library when he returns. In general, the majority of the respondents (92%) agree that students should be made to pay a token levy for library development so as to have funds for training and other library projects.

Conclusion

The findings from the study reveal that library workers can only survive in their ever-expanding roles and increased users' expectations through training and continuing education. There is therefore one inescapable fact, particularly during the period of declining economy, we may never have enough funds or sufficient resources to do all the things we would like to do. Resources will constantly be overloaded by the increasing expectations placed on continuing education by the global changes experienced in librarianship. There is therefore the need for librarians to generate funds for training through many other sources.

The fact that resources are limited for training makes it imperative for university librarians to ensure that efforts are made to identify specific areas of training needs before training is embarked upon. Training should be made to meet the changing job requirements. There should be linkage between the schools and the libraries. The librarian should understand that library schools cannot produce workers with sufficient skills to work in the libraries. Therefore, notwithstanding the training received from the schools, librarians should be provided the opportunity for in-service continuing education and exposure to cope with conflicts occasioned by constant changes and expansion of roles (Hudson 1999; Odi 1999).

For instance, the emergence of the Africa Virtual University Project sponsored by the World Bank aims at powering information technology to increase access to educational resources throughout sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. This new project, which is at its pilot stage, requires that libraries train their workers to cope with the new method of creating access to such educational resources.

Of the 10% of recurrent expenditure of the university made available for library vote, certain percentage should be set aside for training and capacity building. Also, Sources of funds such as, international organizations, donor agencies and foundations should be explored to enhance training and international exposures. Link programs and exchanges should be arranged with university and college libraries in developed countries to experience best practices in the librarianship profession. Most importantly, there should be a re-evaluation and reform of Library Studies curriculum in schools with adequate input from professionals in the field because they experience the transformation taking place in the discipline directly. This will have dual advantages of equipping the students for future challenges in their chosen career as well as reducing the burden of training new recruits (entrants) into the field.

Concluding, expanding roles in libraries will constantly lead to changes in organizational objectives. Methods of achieving library objectives will also change. All these changes require new employees which can only be made through recurrent training. Therefore, life-long learning through continuing education is a must for all libraries in Nigeria.

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