



PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF LIBERIANS AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the paper was to examine professional training of librarians and service delivery in public libraries in Nigeria. It is an opinion paper and therefore expository in nature. The paper discussed the history of public libraries in Nigeria and service delivery. The paper critically reviewed the professional training of librarians in public libraries. It also exposed various library services, such as current awareness, user education, inter-library loan, circulation, reprographic service and challenges affecting the services in the public libraries. The paper recommended among others, professional training for librarians with digital skills to enhance their productivity for efficient and effective service delivery.

KEYWORDS: Education, Service Delivery, Public Libraries and National Development

INTRODUCTION

Libraries in Nigeria have been making significant contributions in providing wide variety of information sources, offering skills and ideas towards social, political and economic development of the country. A public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community either through local, regional and state government or through any other form of immediate rural community organization.

It is universally expected to serve all kinds of people including young children and people with disabilities. In spite of the fact that public libraries existed for a long period since 1932 during the colonial era in Nigeria; it is one of the least developed legacies of the colonialists because of neglect and poor funding. The poor funding of public library has resulted to scanty, outdated and irrelevant collections which cannot meet the public needs; inadequate and out-modeled physical

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structure and equipment, inadequate staffing among others are problems inherent in our public libraries. Umoh, Effiom and Igajah (2021) emphasized that public libraries should provide access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services of which should be available to all library users in the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, ability, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. However, specific services and materials are provided for users who cannot for whatever reason, use the regular service and materials such as linguistics, minorities or people in hospital or prison (INFLA/UNESCO, 2014).

Every organization whether in the private or the public sector strives for effectiveness to achieve some set goals. Edward (2015) viewed effectiveness as the ability to bring about the intended results and, attainment of result from usage of resources and organizational operations. Omori (2016) states that, organizational goals depend on the combination of two factors of personnel skill and the equipment factor. For effective delivery of information services to users, there should be adequately equipped and well-packaged library to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens, decision-makers and life-long learners. This is because information has become the driving force behind the development of nations and proper service delivery has provided raw materials for socio-political and economic development. In the present study, the service delivery of librarians would be measured based on the services they provide in libraries of which the services include lending, user education, reservation and internet/ reference services.

The library provides an effective platform for the acquisition of knowledge especially in this era of technological development in the educational sector (Effiom, Ovat, Nwogwugwu & Umo, 2021). Public libraries are located in most towns and communities in Nigeria to provide service to users. Getzschman (2015) explained that public libraries play unique roles in every city, town and community often representing the only place that encourages everyone, regardless of income or social status, to access the same resources and have the right to freely share the

community stored knowledge. Their only obligation is to return the information source on time and in good condition, allowing others to exercise that same right. All age groups would find materials relevant to their needs. Public library collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental; collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, or commercial pressures. The public library should be supported by specific legislation and the librarian should be an active intermediary between the users and the library resources.

Public libraries are expected to firmly establish their relevance and key into being major facilitators in the achievement of global goals in their different communities; for it's a natural progression of them as institutions that have been part of these communities hence should be trusted enough by all stakeholders to drive development in all spheres of human endeavour (Gutsche, 2022). Public libraries that practice and focus on the changing demographics, lifestyles and societal issues in their localities develop the ability to evolve from being passive repositories of information resources to proactive institutions that explore innovative ways for the provision of services aimed at achieving strategic goals of the community, solving problems and addressing particular situations in the community and the entire nation (Tanawade, 2021). According to Deiss (2014), this has a direct correlation to the sustainability of institutions as major stakeholders in the development of the community and nation.

The extents to which public libraries are able to perform their functions depend on staff quality and efficient service delivery. Staff requires skills, knowledge, experience and ability to effectively perform their duties in the organization. The level of education of the staff may determine the level of skills acquired, knowledge, experience and performance index. Adeleke (2020) and Eyo (2022) submitted that education and training increases the productivity capacity and efficiency of individuals in the organization, Akintayo and Ogbenekohwo (2015) noted that continuous on-the-job training is a tool of skill acquisition because it stimulates and encourage commitment and

improvement in service delivery. Echeng (2016) explain that for effective service delivery, there is a positive relationship between improved job performance and continuous professional training, Olumuyiwa (2016) observes that countries that sustain competitive and innovative firms were better at training young people with skill needed in their industries. He added that to encourage individual to function effectively in any organization, there is need to be dynamic through training and retaining for adaptation. Hence for professional growth and efficiency, a librarian should acquire additional training and retraining through a period of internship.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

The first public library established in Lagos was opened in 1932. It was a subscription library which provided light reading-fiction, biography and current affairs for the civil servants. The British Council operated the Lagos on behalf of Lagos Town Council until 1950 when the Town Council took over the full responsibility of running the library. A remarkable impact was made on the growth of public library in Nigeria by the UNESCO seminar on development of public libraries in Africa, held at the University College, Ibadan from 27th July to 21st August 1953. The seminar ushered a new era for public library development in Nigeria. It emphasized the need and advocated for library legislation to ensure functional library service through adequate funding and efficient administration according to national standard.

In 1952 the governments in the Northern, Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria established public library services in Kaduna, Ibadan and Enugu respectively. In 1955, the Eastern region led in enacting the Eastern Nigeria Library Act of which gave rise to the development of library services in the region. In 1962 the Federal Government enacted National Library Act with an amendment to it in 1970. The States of the Federation also followed the process in 1970 to enact public library Act in their respective States. According to Elaturoti (2022) other regions in Nigeria started setting up their own public library through enabling Edicts and Decrees enacted and passed respectively. Presently, public libraries have flourished all over the country and many of them are suffering neglects. However, they

continue to strive in keeping their existence through several legal means.

Professional Training

Proficiency on the job is a function of professional experience and training. For a librarian to be a specialist in the work, he must have the basic educational qualification and be knowledgeable in his field of specialization. Njama (2018) believes that professional training is anything done consciously to influence the thought or behaviour and attitude of others while Enukoha, Asuquo and Inaja (2014); Akpotiade (2022) are of the view that professional training is the process of transmitting some content of knowledge, skills, values and understanding to the learner in his area of specialization. The librarian in any library setting should possess the required qualification to take up the job as a professional. According to Adeleke (2014), individual proficiency on the job is a function of both professional experience and training. A successful librarian should possess intellectual knowledge in the subject area of needs, must be qualified and should show the desire to assist the readers in retrieving information.

Adeniji (2022) asserted that the level of staff productivity depends on his intelligence, capacity, skills and professional training. He contended that increased profit, increased productivity, increased turnover, improved morals, increased employee's job satisfaction and greater employee's versatility as major indicators of efficiency, have all served as very important reasons among others while training and skills development have gained worldwide acceptance. He further observed there are foreign literature which reveals some critical relationship between improved job performance and continuous professional training. Olumuyiwa (2016) observed that countries that sustain lots of competitive and innovative firms were better at turning out well trained and educated young people with skills needed in their industries. Education is the means of skill acquisition; it is the basis for certification, qualification and admission into various jobs and professions. It is also an essential factor in professional effectiveness and success. Emphasizing the need for training for job effectiveness and success, Udokang (2020), Akintayo and Ogbenekohwo (2015), asserted that

education and training ensures increased productivity at work place, social and political awareness, efficiency in skills acquired, income in monetary terms, self-satisfaction for receiving education, better quality of life leading to elimination of ignorance, superstition, and poverty.

In addition to the basic qualification of a librarian, some training programs may come up from time to time to update knowledge in different aspects. The study by Afolabi (2014) on professional development of reference librarians found out that the ability and knowledge of every staff member increased to some degree during the training period, with the greatest progress made in the acquisition of technical knowledge and the program was more effective in developing conceptual skills. The author concluded that the success of a programme depends on the amount of professional interest in it. There are related studies in Nigeria conducted on the characteristics of library practitioners in some parts of the country. Ajidahun (2017) found that 172 (66.69%) respondents who are in Lagos State are professional librarians with a minimum qualification of a Masters' degree in library science. Okiy (2020) findings in Delta State showed that 22(35.48%) respondents acquire the highest qualification of Doctor of Philosophy in library science. It therefore indicates that without good educational qualification, one cannot become a professional librarian, for he may not be able to administer the reference desk efficiently.

For an effective library service delivery operation to take place, the following qualities and competences must be attained. Afolabi (2014) enumerated the qualities to include academic and professional training must be obtained in a recognized institution of learning. Olumuyiwa (2016) noted that trained workers exhibit; productivity, friendly attitudes of creativity, innovation, knowledge and flexibility which make them outstanding for better and higher level of performance. Olayinka (2015) noted that training is a factor in well-organized job in the library, which is the growing interest in the training, which has reflected in a number of short courses, seminars, and workshops often organized and sponsored by the Federal and State ministries in collaboration with the Universities and Nigerian Library Association.

Kampert (2018) observed that to achieve the quality of professional preparation and training needed for effective work in any organization, the training must cut across a broad spectrum of courses. When an individual opts to obtain additional education, his rate of return at a particular level is raised. Employees that have been trained in the appropriate methods, techniques and procedures have increased confidence in their ability. Thomas (2020) noted that adequate training endows and helps the worker with the ability to make certain assumptions and take precautions when dealing with the clients especially the potentially violent type. To be effective and optimally helpful the worker will have to understand the issues thoroughly and have good training and experience of handling things. Adeleke (2020) carried out a study which investigates the work environment and job performance of librarians working in public universities in South-West, Nigeria with the aid of survey research approach. Questionnaire was used to elicit information from 189 academic librarians, out of which 153 (81%) copies were duly completed and returned. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentage and ANOVA Analysis tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the work environment of librarians in terms of facilities and open communication are fairly favourable while personnel emolument was considered not to be favourable. This inadequacy is reflected in the job performance of the librarians as their performance only seems to be fair. The study also established that there is significant correlation between work training and job performance of the librarians in terms of services delivery to users. From the above studies, it is obvious that professional training is a prerequisite for effectiveness and optimal job performance. Therefore, for librarians in the public libraries to be effective, they need to be trained and retrained among other things for efficient and effective service delivery.

Library Services Delivery

The concept of information service delivery is very essential to every public library in the country. Fundamentally, information service deliveries are library processes and activities that are deployed by libraries to disseminate information services and resources with the aim of enhancing the activities and productivity of library

users. It is observed that libraries have experienced some remarkable developments in recent years. The traditional methods of information dissemination have given way to electronic means of communication. The developments and application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in library operations have improved and facilitated the dissemination of information and access; it has equally provided ICT in libraries that have changed the mode of information storage and retrieval, acquisition cataloguing and classification, circulation of materials, serials, control, management statistics and administrative activities such as budgeting.

In a study carried out by Umoh, Effiom, Igajah and Offem (2024) on ICT Competencies and Utilization of Electronic Library Resources by Undergraduate Students of Library and Information Science, University of Calabar, CRS, Nigeria observed that ICT is a prerequisite to achieved the provision of more effective and efficient information services to users and overall improvement in the performance of the libraries and other related information institutions. More so, the authors revealed that computer literacy, web experience, sex and availability of websites/ databases significantly relates to the utilization of electronic library resources. Thus, the librarian needs to understand the various literacy skills and new strategies required at each stage to function effectively in service delivery. The following are some of the elements of service delivery in libraries:

Current Awareness Services: Reading print and electronic documents whether for business or pleasure are fundamental for any society in the modern world. It is the foundation of democracy, capacity, building and modernization. The library of today should not only store documents and preserve them, it should also devise means of using mails, newsletters and other digital means to communicate with registered users and keep them updated on new arrivals in the library especially in their identified areas of interest.

Online Instruction/ User Education for fresh members: There is the implementation of online-based bibliography or library user programmes such as online tutorials on searching online resources and virtual tours of library collections. Libraries can also use the internet or CD ROMS to

educate users (Olayinka, 2015). Libraries currently implements web-based versions of reader's advisory services to include informing users about new acquisitions, provide reviews and recommendations and so on in using the web.

Inter-library Loan Services: Libraries implement an ICT-based inter-library lending system, through the use of electronic networks for documents delivery. In essence, the Document Delivery Service (DDS) enables a library to use copies of research papers or other research documents, from other libraries. These documents could be journal articles or other documents in digital format. They are mainly in portable document format (PDF) and are delivered to library users' desktops.

Circulation Services: Circulation services are services to library clientele and most of these services are being provided using ICTs. Ebunuwele, Ola and Uduebor (2014) explained that ICTs is used in circulation/ customer service operations to obtain statistical information from the system such as the total number of the book borrowed, subject by subject and number. The system can equally print overdue notice, and books available on the new arrival to the library. The ICT tools can be used to carry out book checks at the point of borrowing and retrieval.

Reprographic Services: Libraries employ the services of photocopiers for making duplicate copies of information materials and making them readily accessible to users.

Challenges Affecting Service Delivery

As a necessary ingredient, digital literacy skill is inevitably required by librarians for career progression and job expertise. Librarians that acquired these skills are undoubtedly more equipped for social networking, blogging, surfing the net, instant messaging, resource sharing, and other activities that are digital-oriented. Digital literacy is that skill that can help librarians on their jobs of assisting library clientele to get information and education as desired. Since these skills can be learnt, there is no justification for any librarian who fails to acquire digital literacy skills. Mahanta (2016) raised issues of cost, ease of use and accessibility as impediments to digital information. Even where all these factors are positive, acquiring the necessary skills is needed by the librarian and the information user too.

Scholars like Adepetun (2018), Chigbu and Idoko (2018), Anyaoku (2017) have identified several factors that hinder librarians from effective use of their digital literacy skills on their job as follows; inadequate information and communication technology infrastructures and online access, lack of information searching skills among library staff and the users, lack of adequate digital skills among staff and users, low basic information literacy levels in the population and prohibitive access of internet in developing countries, constant power failure, weak internet network, the high workload in the office and shortage of time on the part of the librarians.

Chigbu and Idoko (2018) asserted that some librarians in Nigeria are not competent to take on the challenging role of 21st-century information service delivery. They are averse to technology and perceive the application of computers to library work as an aberration. This being the case makes them reluctant to embrace new technology. Tanawade (2021) asserted that many librarians lack confidence in the face of increasing information technology. This slows service delivery and retards productivity. Adeleke (2014) asserted that the most problematic factors which slow down the adoption of information technologies stem from the unfamiliarity of librarians and users with computers and searching databases thus hindering effective service delivery. Edem (2018), states that the major challenge facing the 21st century library is not underfunding but the poor performance of librarians and information professionals in the developing countries as a result of poor ICT skills.

Lack of basic skills in the use of information technology has become a clog to better library services. Rodney (2015) adds that librarians without well-developed ICT skill cannot render effective library services, thus, lack of skills among librarians constitute a major obstacle to service delivery in the 21st century.

Anyaoku (2017) identified poor internet connection as part of the challenges that affects service delivery and these constraints lead to poor internet development in Africa, one of which is the initial capital outlay to install internet facilities. Some African countries are experiencing huge debts and the foreign exchange required to purchase the facilities are lacking. Chigbu and Dim (2022) maintained that there is no efficient telecommunication and power supply base to serve as a spring board for the development of internet services in Africa. Where they are available are very expensive and sometimes rarely affordable. In Nigeria electricity generation is below the consumption level of the population needs, there is low voltage and constant power outage which has frustrated the effective provision of information services. Most public libraries rely on alternative sources of electricity such as power generating machines like: generator, green technology, turbine gas and solar to function which is very expensive to accommodate with the meager resources at disposal. The resultant effect has been the provision of epileptic services. According to Adepetun (2018), the problem of poor power supply in the country have found expression in the expenditure profile, as most organizations expend a huge amount of money providing alternative power supply to run the system. The library as an organization is not an exception from this malady. Effective information service delivery cannot thrive in this type of scenario.

CONCLUSION

Professional training and development of librarians are very crucial for efficient and effective libraries operation in Nigeria. It is observed that public libraries contributed meaningful development by providing effective platform for the acquisition of knowledge especially in this modern age of the country technological development.

The professional training acquired in the educational sector shapes the future of libraries; maintain library operation service such as cataloguing, classification, acquisition processing and storage, retrieval and dissemination operations. The benefits derived from training Liberians enhance library service delivery as well as the challenges of easy implementation of library services in the Country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. Funding and provision of basic facilities in our public libraries should be stepped up by the government of which would enable librarians maintain a position of being relevant, efficient and effective to satisfy the user needs.
2. The provision of ICT facilities and services should be accompanied by regular professional in-service training of staff in every public library in the State and at the Federal levels.
3. Professional training programmes such as seminars, conferences and workshops should be conducted on regular basis for librarians to promote efficient and effective service delivery in public libraries.

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