

CONSTRAINTS TO ACQUISITION OF COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE INFORMATION SERVICES DELIVERY BY LIBRARIANS IN NORTH WESTERN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

BY

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Abstract

The study investigated the constraints to acquisition of competencies by librarians for effective library and information services delivery with specific reference to North Western Nigerian University Libraries. The population of the study comprises 173 librarians from three North Western Universities. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study and questionnaires were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using simple percentages and tables. The study revealed that librarians take advantage of several development programmes in which they still need to develop some skills and competencies in order to be more effective. Financial difficulty, lack of sponsorship and inadequate infrastructure were highlighted as the major constraints that militate against acquisition of competencies by majority of the librarians been studied. It was recommended that their should be a positive attitude of the management in the disbursement of adequate funds towards the training of librarians to enhance maximum service delivery.

Introduction

Libraries have always served as access points for information. As a result of this, university libraries are often considered as the most important and interactive resource centre of academic institution. They exist to enhance the acquisition of knowledge by their clientele through the provision of reading materials, book and non-book for the purposes of teaching, learning and research. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) described the primary purpose of university libraries as to support teaching, learning and research in ways consistence with, and supportive of, the institution's mission and goals. To buttress this, Li and Furht (2014) viewed academic

libraries to be designed primarily to serve their parent institutions most especially by meeting the teaching, research, and learning needs through provision of the services (conventional and digital) that can lead to an increase in the productivity of their students, teachers and researchers. The emergence of Information and Communication Technology in the libraries has led to a need and more acquisition of competencies by librarians. The development and availability of ICT in university libraries required those who are to work in the library to be able to apply appropriate competence that will enable them to make effective use of information for effective library

and information services delivery. Halder (2009) reported that with the emergence of Internet and Communication Technology, libraries have been acquiring different approaches of the same and mode of service. This has brought a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources, a number of which are available in Nigerian university libraries. The academic libraries that can survive in this environment are those that have the ability to deal effectively and proactively to a broad spectrum of contemporary challenges that focus on speed, cost and quality. In consequence, the professionals working in such libraries need continuous grooming by acquiring core competencies and new skills. Batiacila (2010) posited that the development of professional competencies enable us to work efficiently and survive in the world of libraries and information services.

Statement of the Problem

In a competitive global world, the measurement of the worth of an organization lies not in its material wealth but also in its intangible assets and intellectual capital such as the procedure, know-how, experiences and skills that propel the organization into the best level of production and efficiency among its workers. However, some librarians find it difficult to acquire competencies

for services delivery in this fast changing educational environment. Researcher observed that libraries and librarians were facing challenges in accessing and using of information resource irrespective of the location among many are lack of information technology components for practice/work, lack of self and organizational motivation, financial difficulty amongst others, hampered staff from taking advantages of continuing professional development in countries such as Nigeria were discovered. Consequently, it then becomes necessary to investigate the need for acquisition of competencies of librarians in the North Western Nigerian University libraries for effective information services delivery.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine how librarians acquire competencies for service delivery in the university libraries under study.
2. To determine major constraints in acquisition of competencies for librarians in the university libraries under study.

Literature Review

Competency is knowledge, skills and attitude related to work. Knowledge means possession and familiarity with the methods and experience of handling tasks and affairs, whereas, skills refers to the effective utilization of personal knowledge and abilities and attitudes is the

expression of psychological and emotional factors when faced with matters and affairs (Wood 2007, Parry 1996 and Chan 2006). Griffiths and King (1985) opined that competencies are taken to comprise knowledge, skills and attitudes related to effective behaviours and work performance. Professional competencies are a list of group of a series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours that define and contribute to performance (Canadian Association of Research Libraries 2010).

Methods by which Librarians Acquire Competencies

Efficiency of a library depends to a large extent on the competency of its staff for professional development. It is assumed that to maintain professional competence, the professional must participate in updating activities. The library and information science is service oriented and therefore requires continually updated knowledge and skills for effective performance (Adomi and Famola 2013). Professional development for academic librarians fulfills a need for the continuing acquisition of knowledge and competencies that has not been met by either formal education or on-the-job-training. This need is driven by both the technological imperative (the rapid technological change that characterized contemporary academic libraries). Elkin (1994) stressed the need for continuing education in the

modern information environment. She pointed out that education and training must become a continuous lifelong process to keep abreast of change as professional knowledge is becoming increasingly complex and specialized so that individuals need constant updating to keep in touch with their area of specialization. Adomi and Nwalo (2003) buttress that the efficiency of any library and information centre depends on the caliber of its staff. Srivastava and Srivastava (2004) studied the opportunities available for the professional development of librarians and concluded that librarians need opportunities for higher education and opportunities for attending conferences. Sagolsem, Purnima Devi and Vikas (2007) in a survey conducted among the professional librarians in public libraries and NGO libraries evaluated the need of manpower training in IT application and their career opportunities and revealed that the libraries lack sufficient professional staff with required relevant knowledge. Flatley and Weber (2004) reviewed various professional development activities that are required for an academic librarian. They briefed the importance of academic librarians to keep abreast of the profession as it changes rapidly and one of the best ways to do this is by attending professional workshops, lectures seminars etc. For librarians to accomplish their goal in the present digital environment, it is fundamental that

academic library professionals are well trained and possess requisite competencies that can be applied in this respect.

Constraints to the Acquisition of Competencies by Librarians

The general purpose of personnel training in academic libraries is to ensure that library personnel are motivated, productive and skill in their jobs. Accordingly, acquisition of relevant skills is essential for librarians in university libraries so that they can possess necessary skills, knowledge and attitude needed to cope with the change technological environment has brought to the university libraries. Adomi and Nwalo (2003) surveyed the prospects for continuing professional education of library and information science professionals in Nigeria. The Library and Information Science professionals desire to update their skills and knowledge through continuing professional development. However, some constraints, such as lack of Information Technology components for practice/work, lack of self and organizational motivation, financial difficulty, amongst others, hampered staff from taking advantage of continuing professional development in countries such as Nigeria. Osei (1996) studied on professional staff development in academic library argues that there are many problems which militate against professional staff development in spite of its dignified objectives. These include the problems of finance, time,

individual needs and the inability to fulfill rising expectations. Ukwoma and Akanwa (2008) likewise concluded that inadequate funding is the highest factor militating against training and development programmes followed by the lukewarm attitude and lack of support from the management as well as lack of written training and development policies among others. This is in collaboration with Ali & Bakhshi (n.d.) who explained that library and information science professionals face many challenges such as lack of finance, inadequate infrastructure, lack of knowledge and training and supporting policy at the managerial level. Siwakoti (2008) opined that lacks of awareness programme, budgetary constraints, lack of trained and skilled manpower are constraints to skills acquisition. Similarly, Obi (2013) identified financial constraint; inadequate staff strength; lack of staff in academic libraries; lack of interest on the part of the staff, lack of needs analysis and written training policy and poor responsive attitude on the part of management as the major constraints for acquisition of relevant skills in academic libraries in Nigeria.

Methodology

A survey design was used for this study and the entire 173 librarians from three University Libraries in North Western Nigerian were used. The total number of questionnaires administered to

the respondents were 173 out of which 137(79%) study. were duly completed and found usable for the

Findings

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed and discussed using simple percentages and tables.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Response Rate

S/N	University Libraries	No. of question-naire adminis-tered	No. of question-naire retrieved	Per-centage
1.	Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Complex, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto State	21	17	81
2.	Bayero University Library, Kano, Kano State	33	26	79
3.	Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State	119	94	79
Total		173	137	79

Table 1 indicate librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library (A.B.U) with 94 (79%), Bayero University Library, (B.U.K.) with 26 (79%) and Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Complex Sokoto (UDU), with 17 (81%). The clear disparity in staff population of the library studied is be attributed to the size of the libraries studied.

Table 2: Acquisition of Competencies by Librarians for Service Delivery

Methods of Acquisition	University Libraries						Total	
	UDU		BUK		ABU			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Professional workshop	14	67	20	76	88	94	122	89
Seminars	15	88	24	92	92	98	131	96
Lectures	11	65	15	58	74	79	100	73
Training by library bodies	11	65	15	58	69	73	95	73
Formal education	14	82	19	73	88	94	121	88
Distance learning	2	12	3	12	11	12	16	12

Key: UDU: Usman Danfodio University Sokoto, BUK: Bayaro University Kano, ABU: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Table 2 indicates that 122 (89%) of librarians acquire competencies for effective service delivery through professional workshop. Seminars, 131(96%), lectures, 100 (73%) while 95 (69%) of them said that they acquire competency through training by library bodies. However, the response rate for formal education was 121 (88%) while distance learning 16 (12%) which shows that it is not an

effective method. The implication of the above findings is that the universities may not really see the necessity for distance learning. These findings are in line with Flatley and Weber (2004) who noted that academic librarians should keep abreast of the profession as it changes rapidly and emphasized that one of the best ways to do this is by attending professional workshops, lectures and seminars.

Table 3: Constraints to Acquisition of Competencies by Librarians

Constraints	Institution						Total	
	UDU		BUK		ABU			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Information technology components	13	76	19	73	71	76	103	75
Organizational motivation	15	88	19	73	71	76	105	77
Financial difficulty	14	82	19	73	88	94	121	88
Budgetary	15	88	19	73	74	79	108	79
Lack of sponsorship	14	82	21	81	84	89	119	87
Personal interest and initiative	8	47	10	38	29	31	47	34
Lack of written training policy	13	76	11	42	50	53	74	54
Inadequate infrastructure	15	88	20	77	75	80	110	80
Inadequate staff strength	8	47	10	38	43	46	61	45

Key: UDU: Usman Danfodio University Sokoto, BUK: Bayaro University Kano, ABU: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Table 3 Findings indicate that the greatest obstacle is Financial difficulty as perceived by 121 (88%) of the respondents, lack of sponsorship 119 (87%) and inadequate infrastructure 110 (80%), while personal interest and initiative and inadequate staff strength tended to be the least constraints with frequencies of 47 (34%) and 61 (45%) respectively. The implication of the above findings is that majority of these constraints hindered librarians from acquiring competencies for effective library and information service delivery in University Libraries under study. These

findings are in line with Adomi and Nwalo (2003), Siwakoh (2008) and Obi's (2013) who noted some constraints to skills acquisition as lack of information technology components for practice/work, lack of self and organizational motivation, financial difficulty amongst others hampered librarians from taking advantage of professional development in the University Libraries under study.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that a number of forces of change have been seen to influence information services at the present and are likely to be felt even more in the future. These challenges require appropriate skills and competencies so as to ensure that the information needs of the organization are met in the new information environment. Thus, it has become necessary for librarians in university libraries to learn and adjust themselves to the new environment by equipping themselves with corresponding competencies to enable them catch up with the technological advances and adopt the development to the library work for effective and efficient library and information service delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusion of this study.

1. Librarians should be zealous in learning and have professional development plans to attend conferences and workshops in order to strengthen their personal advantages, cope with changes caused by challenges at work and achieve the set goals of a university library.
2. For effective and efficient library and information service delivery to be visible in North Western Nigerian University Libraries, the attitude of the management must be positive towards provision of

available funds for the training of librarians and as well as implementation of a training policy so that the librarians can have advantage of professional development.

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