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CONSTRAINTS TO CONTINUING EDUCATION OF PRACTISING LIBRARIANS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN IMO STATE

BY

TAIWO ADETOUN AKINDE (MRS)

ABSTRACT

This work focuses on the deterrents to the continuing education of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo state. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The main instrument for data collection is a questionnaire schedule. It is designed and distributed to the forty-eight (48) professional librarians of the five academic libraries in Imo State, namely, Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri; Imo State University Library, Owerri; Federal Polytechnic Library, Nekede, Owerri; Alvan Ikoku College of Education Library, Owerri and Michael Okpara College of Agriculture and Technology, Umuagwo. The researcher visited the libraries to administer the questionnaire personally while data collected were analyzed descriptively using tables, percentages and frequency distribution. Among the constraints to continuing education as identified by the study are: favouritism, lack of top management support, lack of efficient succession and career plans by the library, lack of interest / indifference of practising librarians themselves, family commitment, inadequacy of fund and the artificiality of most continuing education packages and settings. The paper recommends that heads of academic libraries and institutions should ensure equity and fairness in recommending staff for continuing education while any staff who wishes to sponsor themselves should be promptly released and rewarded quickly at the end of his/her education or training. Finally, the Nigerian Library Association is urged to make the continuing education programmes it offers to its members more relevant to the work demands of librarians

INTRODUCTION

A lot has been written about continuing education. Many scholars have given various definitions of continuing education. Some see it as the continuing training of personnel who are already qualified to practise their professions. In other words, continuing education is undertaken only after the professional qualification would have been achieved with the intent of maintaining competence and for learning new skills. Trask (1996) agrees with the above definition but adds that continuing education is usually

short, formal and informal which creates opportunities to maintain competence and meet professional standards of practice. 'Continuing education is a process of engaging in education pursuits with the goal of keeping up-to-date in the knowledge and skills of one's profession. This is because of the fact that usually, current professional issues and modernity are always scheduled for discussions at continuing education programmes / event (Weingaud, 1998).

Continuing education essentially is educational activities primarily designed to keep practising librarians and information professionals abreast of their particular domain in the library and information centre and to provide them with training in new field. Continuing education provides opportunities for acquisition of skills and knowledge and a second chance for further education which people were unable or unwilling to undertake on leaving school (Ole Pors & Schreiber, 1996). In the view of Cordis (2000), continuing education comprises:

all activities that make an individual fit for doing a certain job, growing in that job and for keeping up with changes that have an impact on the nature of that job. It may enable a person to eventually transcend the job he or she has been trained for, and to do quite different job with equal and perhaps more satisfaction.

Continuing education is more or less a lifelong process whereby an individual is exposed to changes all the time. This is against the backdrop that learning is never complete and continues throughout one's life. Continuing education is therefore not restricted to purely professional knowledge but includes the development of one's ability to make decisions and the wisdom acquired through day-to-day living. Though continuing education builds on and updates previously acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes; nevertheless, updating of knowledge and skills is not just a matter of satisfying intellectual curiosity and self-esteem; it is in the development of the right attitudes and in making the right decisions in-day-to-day work. (Aina, 2004; Clegg, 1988; Simsova, 2000).

Thus, continuing education involves continuing professional education (education that takes place once professional qualification is achieved, with the intent of maintaining competency and / or learning new skills in one's profession or other related professions) and continuing personal education (education which is related to personal interest outside the workplace). The two types of education are expected to continue till retirement and / or death.

For continuing education to be successful and rewarding, it must therefore, include:

- i. investment by the society in education

- ii. investment by employers in training, and,
- iii. investment by individuals in time and money in their own development.

Practising librarians in this study refer to all the professional librarians of the ^{Five} academic libraries under study that are eligible for registration or are registerable by the Librarians' (Registration, Etc.) Council of Nigeria to practise librarianship in Nigeria. Academic libraries are libraries that are found in institutions of higher learning such as university, polytechnic and colleges of education. They are also identified more precisely in their institutional settings as university libraries, polytechnic libraries and college libraries respectively. As academic libraries, they are meant to support the teaching and research needs of the institution to which they are part of. The five academic libraries are Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Federal Polytechnic Nekede and Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri and Michael Okpara College of Agriculture and Technology, Umuagwo.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES UNDER STUDY

The Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri, opened officially for readers on the 9th of November 1981 with Mr. J. C. Anafulu, as the pioneer University Librarian. It was located at a temporary site at Lake Nwaebere Campus. However, on the 17th May, 1993 the library moved along with the University, to the permanent site at Ihiagwa. Presently, the library operates in two library buildings: the Pilot plant and the Phase IV library buildings. It has twenty-seven (27) professional librarians.

The Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri was formerly College of Technology, Owerri. It was established by Edict No 16 of 1978 which among other things empowered the college to erect, provide and maintain libraries. The library of the Federal Polytechnic, Nekede was established alongside with the College in 1978. It operates four major functional departments which include bibliographic services, collection development, reader services and the general administration departments. It has four (4) professional librarians.

Alvan Ikoku College of Education Library, Owerri was established in 1963, the same year the institution was founded. It is the oldest higher institution library in Imo-State. Initially the library was housed in a temporary building in the former Shell Camp. It moved into its present building (along Orlu Road), which was provided by UNESCO in 1970 at the end of the Nigerian Civil War. The library has four (4) professional librarians.

As Imo State University (IMSU) was created by act No, 4 of 1981 passed by the Imo State House of Assembly on 23rd February that year.

1993
The University in was ~~1993~~ relocated from Okigwe to its present site at Lake Nwaebere, Owerri. The library system of IMSU consists of the Main Library, the Law Library, the College of Medicine Library, the Library of the Faculty of Business Administration, the Department of Architecture Library and the Library of Faculty of Social Sciences. It has nine (9) professional librarians.

The library of Michael Okpara College of Agriculture and Technology was established in 1973 at Umuagwo, Ohaji Local Government Area of Imo State. By October 1982, the library was provided with a building and a pioneer College Librarian, Mr. M. N. Njoku. It started full operation in 1983. However, in 2003, a bigger library building was constructed with the help of the Educational Tax Fund (ETF). The library is a depository for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of United Nations and it has two (2) professional librarians.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study intends to:

1. find out the types of the continuing education programmes made available in the five academic libraries understudy.
2. identify the constraints to the continuing education of practising librarians in the five academic libraries in Imo State.
3. establish the factors or conditions that create room for the constraints;
4. make suggestions on how an effective continuing education of practising librarians in the five academic libraries in Imo State can be encouraged.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As early as 1974, Stone published a research which revealed that the profession lacked continuing education programmes that provide relevant content of high quality that addressed the actual needs of practising librarians. According to her, many continuing education programmes being offered lacked continuity and in most cases, was an occasional workshop. This was further buttressed by Ole-Pors and Schreiber (1996) when they argued that continuing education courses lack frequency. More often than not, continuing education activities appear to be irregular.

Farmer and Campbell (1998) argued that lack of management support, time off and finance are problems standing in the way of the professional development of practising librarians in academic libraries.

Smith (2000) posits that the profession lacks a cadre of experts that are knowledgeable in the components of continuing education and the development and implementation of the programmes, and that we have little evidence to indicate the widespread use of transfer of training techniques. He observes that the profession's continuing education

system is largely informal and unstructured. In the words of Lim (1999), librarians lay too much emphasis on infrastructural development rather than on human resources development.

Akinde (2004) identifies the following as factors inhibiting the continuous professional development of practising librarians:

- Resistance to developing subordinates.
- Lack of efficient succession and career plans by the library / institution.
- Lack of sincerely done performance appraisal by the library / institution.
- Stiff resistance and hostility, sometimes encountered by practising librarians when attempting to implement new knowledge or skill gained (in continuing education programmes) in their work environment, as colleagues will frequently be uninterested or skeptical about the need for change.
- The artificiality of most training packages and settings which make the transfer of training to the real world of work difficult.
- Lack of training / education officer and / or committee charged with the responsibility of supervising or organizing continuing education programmes.

Castelyn (2005) lays the problem of continuing education squarely on the doorsteps of what he calls pre-course briefing and after-course assessment. He observes that during pre-course briefings by the employing libraries, the expectation of the employers from the employees with regard to the course are stated and clarified while an after-course assessment enables the employer to know whether learning has actually taken place. Thus, without a pre-course briefing, employees who are scheduled to engage in a course may not know what is actually required from them while the employers will lack means of knowing whether learning has actually taken place without an after-course assessment.

The strength of this research lies in revealing those impediments that frustrate the availability and application of continuing education programmes in the libraries of Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri and Michael Okpara College of Agriculture and Technology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The sample size of this research consist of all the forty-eight (48), staff who are professional librarians in the five academic libraries in Imo state namely Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri and Michael Okpara College of Agriculture and Technology. Because the population size is not large, no sampling technique was adopted, hence,

all the professional librarians in the five academic libraries in Imo State were purposively chosen as respondents.

The main instrument that was used for data collection is the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained three sections. Section A deals with the biographical data of the respondents while Section B deals with the types of as well as deterrents to the continuing education of the librarians. Section C contains suggestions on how to improve and put in place an effective continuing education for practising librarians working in academic libraries in Imo state. In all, the questionnaire has five (5) open-ended and seven (7) close ended questions. The researcher visited the libraries understudy to administer the questionnaire personally. This facilitated early responses and offered the respondents opportunity to clarify their doubts. Filling and collecting of the copies of the questionnaire took two visits to these libraries.

Data was analyzed descriptively using tables, simple percentages and frequency distribution.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

In all, forty-eight (48) copies of the questionnaire were administered on the professional librarians of the five academic libraries in Imo state. Out of these, forty (40) copies representing 83% were duly completed and returned. Thus, subsequent analysis will be based on the forty (40) copies of the questionnaire returned by the respondents. The remaining eight (8) copies of the questionnaire were not filled or retrieved because the holders were sick or proceeded on annual leave.

Table 1 shows the seven types of formal continuing education programmes and the frequency of participation by the practising librarians in academic libraries understudy, 31 or 29.5% of the respondents said they have attended seminars / workshops, 23 or 21.9% said that they have attended conferences whereas 27 or 25.7% indicated that they had undergone formal courses leading to higher degrees. Only 1 or 0.9% of the practising librarians had participated in organized site visits and short term courses whereas only 2 or 1.9% have attended symposia / colloquia in the past see table 1.

A	Formal courses leading to higher degrees	27	25.7%
B	Seminars / Workshops	31	29.5%
C	Conferences	23	21.9%
D	Site visits and short term courses	1	0.9%
E	Symposia / Colloquia	2	1.9%
F	Other	38	36.4%
G	Total	109	

Table I: FORMAL CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

S/N	OPTION	FREQUENCY	PER-CENTAGE (%)
A	Seminars / workshops	31	29.5
B	Conferences	23	21.9
C	Formal courses	27	25.7
D	In-service trainings	20	19.1
E	Organized site visits	1	0.9
F	Short term courses	1	0.9
G	Symposia/colloquia	2	1.9
	Total	105	100

For the informal continuing education, a good number of the respondents had never participated. As shown on Table II, 26 or 52% of the respondents had never participated in any type of informal continuing education programmes, whereas 6 or 12% had participated both in mentoring/consultancy and peer's review/ editorials. 11 or 22% said they had participated in collaborative teaching with library educators even as only 1 or 2% had participated in networking via chartrooms and newsgroup. It is interesting to note that no practising librarian in any of the academic libraries has ever participated in teleconferencing / telemeeting via the Internet see Table II.

The analysis of data, shows that seminars / workshops, formal courses leading to higher degrees, conferences and in-service trainings were the most frequently attended formal continuing education programmes by practising librarians in Imo State. Other formal continuing education programmes like symposium / colloquium, organized site visit, guided sabbatical / research leave, staff exchange among academic libraries, short term courses and linkages with other related professions were not popular among these practising librarians.

Table II: INFORMAL CONTINUING EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

S/N	OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
A	Mentoring / Consultancy	6	12.0
B	Networking via chartroom and newsgroup	1	2.0
C	Teleconferencing/Tele-meeting via Internet	-	-
D	Collaborative teaching with library educators	11	22.0
E	Peer's review / Editorial	6	12.0
F	None of the above	26	52.0
	Total	50	100

On the constraints that face practising librarians in CEPs, the respondents gave their views as found on table III which shows that 21 or 12.58% of the librarians saw favouritism as one of the deterrents to continuing education. Other constraints to the continuing education of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo State are inadequacy of fund with 35 or 20.96% was found to be the most common. This was followed by lack of top management support/permission with 34 or 20.36%. 19 or 11.38% of the respondents confirmed that lack of interest/indifference of practising librarians themselves is another constraint to their continuing education. However, distance of the venue / health reasons were found to be the constraints to continuing education for 16 or 9.58% of the respondents.

Other constraints as identified by the research include lack of efficient succession and career plans by the library / institution (10 or 5.99%), artificiality of most continuing education packages and settings (8 or 4.79%), lack of competent replacement for the trainee (6 or 3.59%), lack of adequate planning by the organizers of the continuing education programmes (3 or 1.8%) politics and tribalism (3 or 1.8%), and lack of information on the available continuing education programmes (3 or 1.8%) and motivation to attend them (3 or 1.8%).

TABLE III: CONSTRAINTS TO CONTINUING EDUCATION

s/no	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	percentage (%)
A	Favouritism	21	12.58
B	Lack of efficient succession and career plans by the library	10	5.99
C	Lack of interest / indifference of librarians themselves	19	11.38
D	Family commitment	15	8.98
E	Inadequacy of fund	35	20.96
F	Distance of the venue / health reasons	16	9.58
G	Artificiality of most continuing education packages and settings	8	4.79
H	Lack of competent replacement for the trainee	6	3.59
I	Lack of top management support/permission	34	20.36
J	Lack of adequate planning by the organizers of CEPs	3	1.8
K	Politics and tribalism	3	1.8
L	Lack of information on the available CEPs and	3	1.8
E	Lack of motivation to attend	3	1.8
	Total	176	100

Apart from the constraints stated above, there are other stringent conditions that practising librarians are subjected to, before sponsorship or permission to attend CEPs is granted. According to table IV, 16 or 32.65% of the respondents said that they were required to fully pay-up their membership subscription to the association involved (e.g. NLA) before they could either be sponsored or permitted to participate in external continuing education programmes. 10 or 20.41% said that paper presentation is a requisite for their participation while 5 or 10.20% claimed that they were required to sponsor themselves partially. For 3 or 6.12% said they were required to meet all the conditions specified above before they could be sponsored / permitted to participate in continuing education programmes. However, 11 or 22.45% of the respondents could not give any response to the question because they had never participated in externally organized continuing education programmes before.

It is encouraging to note that some libraries / institutions did not impose any of these conditions whatsoever on their librarians, this was indicated by 4 or 8.16% of the librarians.

TABLE IV: CONDITIONALITIES TO BE MET BEFORE PARTICIPATION IN CEPs

S/No	TYPE OF CONDITION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
A	Up-to-date payment of membership subscription to the association involved	16	32.65
B	Partial funding	5	10.20
C	Presentation of paper	10	20.41
D	All of the above	3	6.12
E	None of the above	4	8.16
F	No response	11	22.45
	Total	49	100

The respondents provided a number of suggestions on how to effectively improve the participation of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo State to continuing education programmes. Table V shows that 31 or 21.09% of the respondents suggested that for continuing education programmes to be effective, academic libraries should be well funded by their institutions and governments. For, 21 or 14.29% of the respondent, there should be more enlightenment on the role of continuing education in the professional development of practising librarians, even as 20 or 13.61% of the librarians suggested that managers of academic libraries should desist from partiality / favouritism when selecting / sponsoring / permitting staff for continuing education programmes.

12 or 8.16% of the librarians suggested that individuals should sponsor themselves where institutional sponsorship is not forthcoming and that library policy on professional staff development should be constantly reviewed. 11 or 7.48% of the respondents insisted that libraries should partially fund / subsidize practising librarians' participation where the available fund cannot go round for full sponsorship and that internally organized continuing education programmes which will be as recognized as the external ones should be organized more regularly.

10 or 6.8% of the respondents suggested that information on the available continuing education programmes and venues should be widely disseminated by the academic library managements to the professional staff in their libraries and that family conditions should be considered so that staff can participate in continuing education programmes without any distractions.

For 9 or 6.12% of the respondents, their suggestion is that individuals who sponsor themselves to continuing education programmes should be rewarded and properly placed on staff cadre on their return to their libraries after their education / training.

TABLE V: SUGGESTIONS SUBMITTED BY RESPONDENTS

S/NO	SUGGESTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
A	Adequate funding (by the institutions / government) of academic libraries	31	21.09
B	Impartiality of management in selecting / sponsoring / permitting those for CEPs	20	13.61
C	Dissemination of information about, the available CEPs and their venues	10	6.80
D	More enlightenment on the role of continuing education to the practising librarians' professional development	21	14.29
E	Review of policy on library staff (professional) development	12	8.16
F	Partial funding / subsidy where the available fund cannot go round for full sponsorship	11	7.48
G	Personal sponsorship when institution's sponsorship is not forthcoming	12	8.16
H	Institutions and organizers should reward librarians who sponsor themselves	9	6.12
I	Family planning	10	6.80
J	More frequent organized internally CEPs (that will be as recognized as the external ones)	11	7.48
	Total	147	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions could be observed.

i. Formal continuing education programmes like symposium / colloquium, organized site visit, guided sabbatical / research leave, staff exchange among academic libraries, short – term courses are less popular in academic libraries in Imo State.

ii. Favouritism, inadequacy of fund, lack of top management support or permission, lack of interest / indifference of practising librarians themselves, distance of the venue / health reasons, family commitment, lack of efficient succession and career plans by the libraries / institutions and the artificiality of most continuing education packages and settings which make the transfer to the real world of work difficult, have been found to be the major constraints to the continuing education of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo state.

iii. Adequate funding of academic libraries, more enlightenment on the role of continuing education in professional development, impartiality of top men in selecting those for continuing education, personal sponsorship and a review of (professional) staff development policy, were the major suggestions advanced by the respondents as solutions to the constraints identified by the study and also as means of encouraging an effective continuing education of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study: the following recommendations are made:

Practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo state should engage more in other formal continuing education programmes like symposium / colloquium, organized site visit, guided sabbatical / research leave, staff exchange among academic libraries, short-term courses and linkages with other related professions. Also, professional / academic staff can be provided with manuals for self development and a well stocked staff-library by their libraries / institutions. In the same vein, informal (self directed) continuing education activities like review of peer's works / editorials, networking via chartrooms and newsgroups, teleconferencing / telemeeting, consultancy/ mentoring, self-study / independent reading, publications/ publishing and collaborative teaching in library schools with library educators should be encouraged among practising librarians in the state.

Continuing education of practising librarians in academic libraries in Imo state should no longer be an option. It should be a requirement for professional practice which must be enshrined in Nigeria's education policy and monitored by the government via its educational agencies (e.g. NBTE, NUC and NBCE), the employing libraries / institutions, and the Librarians' (Registration, Etc.) Council of Nigeria.

Furthermore, librarians working in academic libraries in Imo State are advised to be more proactive once it comes to their professional development. Finally, the Nigerian Library Association should make the continuing education programmes it offers to its members more relevant to the world of work.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

The study revealed that the majority of librarians in academic libraries in Imo state are not engaged in continuing education. This is a cause for concern as the profession is dynamic and requires continuous learning to remain relevant. The following recommendations are made to address this issue:

1. The Nigerian Library Association should make continuing education programmes more relevant to the world of work.
2. Librarians working in academic libraries in Imo State should be more proactive in seeking professional development opportunities.
3. The government should enshrine continuing education as a requirement for professional practice in Nigeria's education policy.
4. Educational agencies (e.g. NBTE, NUC and NBCE) should monitor the implementation of continuing education programmes.
5. Employing libraries/institutions should encourage and support their librarians in pursuing continuing education.

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