

The Needs and Prospects of Upskilling Community Information Service Personnel for Societal Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper discusses the needs and prospects of up-skilling community information service personnel for societal development in Nigeria. The burning issues that were x-rayed in this paper include: information services, upskilling and the needs; community, prospects of community information services and place of information services personnel in societal development. The paper concludes among other things that: managements of both public and private information services existing in Nigeria communities should endeavour to be upskilling their information delivery personnel regularly in order to update their knowledge, skills and competencies to achieve the 21st century information services of their staff and the potential users' needs. The researchers suggest that government should make sure that public libraries in Nigeria are adequately funded to achieve the desired information purposes in the society; workshops, seminars and conferences should be constantly organized for training and retraining of information personnel to enable them stay agile, competent, innovative and responsive to the changes in their jobs.

Keywords: Information Service, Personnel, Upskilling, Need of Upskilling, Community, Prospects of Upskilling, Community Development.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the impacts of information services have been felt in all sectors in the 21st century societal development era. Access to information services in a society has been a key driver of societal progress and breakthroughs. Information is power hence the direction of many nations today is focused on evoking positive changes in the spheres of her citizens and environments using information services delivery. Information service is a long desired attitudinal building process through which functional individuals are molded and transformed into new opportunities of insights, innovation, creativity and active participants in the immediate and future problem solving of their society. According to Nzeneri (2020), information is a life blood of every society and a key hub for socio-economic growth and societal development. Many aspects of life activities are now digitalized, such as communication, education, commerce and societal development principles and procedures; which have to large extent boosted socio-economic of a society (Atu, Otty & Unobnja, 2022). Government/nation performs credibly in development when her information delivery service systems are active and sophisticated. Sophistication in this process entails having development that spans beyond Information and Communications Technologies system; to emphasize human development processes that transform information services into knowledge economy that enables individuals and organizations effect a lasting desired change in social development and sustainability (Akpan & Udo, 2019). Hence, this calls for urgent need of accurate and timely information services in our communities.

The need for community information services in our communities is numerous. Community information service is a need because, the communities we live in; and interact with are filled with socio-economic fluxes that hamper our joyful living and fulfilled environmental habitation and livelihood (Manas, 2018). According to Atu, Otty and Unobnja (2022), information services dissemination is an outlet for educating humans worldwide; and has been approved as panacea for curbing illiteracy, ignorance, workers unskillfulness, poverty,

environmental degradation, national development among others. Many of these virtues are lacking behind in our communities and thus call for proper information service supports to remedy the gaps.

In terms of definition, information services refers to the various ways in which information is collected, processed and disseminated to the public cum individuals, organizations and communities to access and utilize (Udoka & Paul, 2021). This includes: library and archival services, research instructions and think tanks, Newspaper and media outlets, consulting and advisory services, information support services, knowledge management and expertise network services and others. Library as an information service institution or centre is a place to extend learners education and instructions beyond the required curriculum. Accordingly, Nwaigwe (2012) views library as a place where literary and artistic materials, such as books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, tapes and artifacts are kept for reading, reference, or lending. It is also an information institution entrusted with the duties of providing concrete information to the users and at the right time. While community Newspaper to Udoka and Paul (2021) is a branch of information dispatching service that focuses on covering news and events that are relevant to communities and some specific concern of the community residents. It is also a vital part of media industry which provides a platform for people to voice out their concern, their development needs and issues that are often overlooked by the larger news bodies (Nzelum & Unegbu, 2019). Furthermore, information services institutions are essential units purposely established for transmitting right knowledge, competencies and attitudes to the users which enabled them happily solve their personal problems and willingly participate in their community building programmes (Dennis, 2017). Dennis further submits that the key drivers for digital and media connectivity are the trained information service experts. Aptly, the place of upskilling information services personnel in data dissemination in a society is vital in community development agenda.

Upskilling refers to the process of learning new skills or enhancing existing ones to stay relevant and productive in one's profession. It is also a process of promoting continuous learning by offering training and development opportunities to expand the skills, knowledge and competencies of the workers or employees in an institution or organization (Tatiana, 2024). Upskilling is a strategy used to develop new skills and knowledge of staff. Workers upskilling gives them a chance to build up expertise, advance their personal and professional growth, acquisition of performance-factors and critical thinking skills to the workplace and for the future success of their institution and job satisfaction. Training gives workers willingness to work hard and empathy, today, knowledge can be relevant in one moment and outdated in the next (Dennis (2017). Tatiana (2024) further states that without workers access to upskilling, development to keep knowledge up to date, other skills and attitudes lose their impact. Similarly, Otty, Okeafor and Igwe (2022) maintain that a competitive advantage, knowledge, and skills civil servants gain in seminar trainings, symposia, online courses, workshops, on the-job training and others; give them advantage to excel in job descriptions and outperform their uninformed counterparts in leadership positions. Quoting Dennis (2017), studies have proved that there is gap increased in a broader worldview between trained community development agents in the knowledge experiences and productivity levels than uniformed agents. The need for upskilling information services staff is important in today's information field and societal development quest.

The needs and reasons for upskilling information services personnel are numerous. The needs among others are:

- I. Upskilling enhances information service personnel experiences which enables them to design and deliver information more effectively to users-centered services.
- II. To enable them stay current with technological advancements and technological demands. The rapid move of technological changes this age requires

information services staff continuing learning and adaptation to remain relevant in the profession.

- III. To improving information recovery and having access in staying up-to-date with new tools and current methods for dispatching information to the users.
- IV. High in-depth knowledge of technologies acquisitions by information service personnel boosts his/her ability to connect the information users with relevant information.
- V. Upskilling enhances digital literacy of a staff and as well expands his/her skills in other digital areas; like data analysis and cloud computing enabling the information services professionals to render effective supports to users and others (Edom & Idoma, 2023; Udeji. Nwaebo & Akueshi 2022; & Dennis (2017)

Going by the above statements, one can deduce that one of the target objectives of information services institutions and information services personnel is to help users apply relevant information to achieve their desired goals. Hence, the objective end of upskilling information staff is mirrored down to helping users attain their socio-economic development and life status. Apparently, there is a link between upskilling information services personnel and societal development. The two concepts have different views but gear towards a common purpose. Note, society/community is interchangeably used in this work.

Community as a concept is a group of interdependent and inter-related people who function in a common geographical area, with common needs, interest, and engage in common activities and different functions that gear towards attaining their common set goals and objectives (Avwalu & Hadiza, 2018). Nigeria as a nation is a multi-ethnic group with several communities that share common rights, interests, goals, often interacting with one another with close and frequent personal relationship or enjoyment. The word community is without a question central to human experience. Being part of an engaging community gives us a sense of belonging that enables us to share personal relationship that supports perpetual growth of each other, to ourselves and our environment/ community.

Community development on the other hand is a strategy designed to enable community members contribute to their community development projects. It is also the process of building and strengthening communities through various initiatives and activates of the community members with or without government grants. Community development process is always by the people and for the people. A society that loses control of its records will eventually lack sense of purpose and limited national social supports in its current development trend (Amadi, 2021). People working together to build their community, maintain their cultural heritage, enhance their living standards and solve the common problems that threaten their existence in the community. In collaboration, Nzeneri (2020) states that community growth and development is of a man and by the man. Human beings are the architect of their growth and also the beneficiaries. Peoples' growth and participation in community development is very essential to the government existence and survival (Akin, 2019). Acquisition of useful information facilitates high rate of literacy, economic, politics, unity and stability in the society. As well, an informed community member is competent in community development decision- making (Ihebereme, 2023).

Furthermore, community development entails peaceful co-existence among all the member groups and diverse backgrounds in a society. Tatiana (2024) and Alabi (2023) submit that community information of all sorts is records of human thought designed in physical forms. This implies that peoples' thoughts of community are embodied in useful charts, manuscripts, books, and others are arranged, stored and preserved in a physical functional structure for the community needs and utilization by the potential users. Philips and Stephen (2022) submit that every human being living in a society has information needs either individually or communally. Aptly, the prospects of having functional community information service centres and the professionals in a community are an essential need.

The Prospects of Information Services in Community

The prospects of information services in communities cannot be over emphasized. In all ramifications, information services in a community constitute the building blocks of the community's economic, social, increased awareness, and better problem-solving among others. According to Philips and Stephen (2022); Nzelem and Unegbu (2019); and Dennis (2017) the prospects of information services in a community among others are:

- a. Information services boost shared information facilities collaboration and coordination among community individuals, organizations and stakeholders.
- b. It enhances increased awareness of the people in understanding their local issues, events and encouraging more educated and civilized citizenry.
- c. Fostering of community participation: information services enable community members feel connected/oneness to use their resources and personal energy to contribute willingly in their community development programmes.
- d. It boosts equal accessibility and inclusiveness access to lifelong education.
- e. By constant training, information services personnel can stay agile, innovative, and responsive to the evolving needs of users and organizations and as well enriching their professional practice.
- f. It enhances community cohesion and joyful co-habitations among community members.
- g. Enhancing economic growth and supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs through market research, industry and innovative activities of the community.
- h. Offering reliable of health and wellness information and support for health living.
- i. Bridging the digital divide by ensuring equal access to information technology and digital literacy training.
- j. Supports education and research. Community information services provide a foundation for learning research innovation; which thereby driving personal and community growth and sustainability
- k. Community newspaper room plays a critical role in keeping residents informed about what is happening in the neighborhoods, city and the nation at large.

l. Serve as “Communication Bridge” between the government and community development agents and urban dwellers.

m. Embarks on preserving cultural enrichment and promotion of local history, arts, cultural heritage and a platform for people to voice out their opinions and ideas.

Accordingly, Ekwebelum and Otty (2023); Ali and Udo (2021); Nzelum and Unegbu, (2019) submit other prospects of community library’s services to society to include:

- Public library, being the library of a community plays important roles in providing effective community information services to the community members;
- Serves as critical interface between the communities and the nation;
- Improves quality of life for the people in their respective communities as well as facilitates their social interaction and acquisitions of desired educational needs of the community members;
- Provides crucial information and meeting the information needs of the people; and contributes to social developments of community members
- Libraries as repository of knowledge are used by potential users to build up a valued system for themselves.
- Library is a centre for continuing education cum -self-directed trainings. Adults and youths of a community continue their formal and non-formal reading/study in the library; with the help of library personnel to attain their educational needs and others according to their desires ;
- Library as information service system makes people erudite, civilized and cultured. An effective educational system is largely dependent on the abundant and meaningful ready material available and accessible in the centre.

The Place of Information Services Personnel in Societal Development.

The place of information services personnel generally in societal development are numerous to mention. According to Tatiana

(2024); Nwaokezuike (2021); and Avwalu and Hadiza (2018) information service personnel play vital roles in societal development in the following ways:

They preserve cultural heritage and historical records of the society;

- Expose learners to real life worker experience and making them become agents of change in the society;
- Provide information services that accomplish the advancement of learning as well as the building blocks of a nation;
- Provide community outreach and engagement to the community members;
- Facilitate access to information and informed decision-making in the society;
- Foster literacy and digital literacy of the users thereby helping them to acquire life yielding skills for their optimal livelihood and participation in social development;
- They use their knowledge and competencies to support learner's research and innovation needs and growth;
- Rendering reference services and research support directives to the learners /users.
- Educating the learners with in-depth research and analysis which boosts adult learners' quick and speedy information awareness on literacy education and social development;
- They render useful instruction and training to the learners; thereby teaching them how to find and evaluate information;
- They aid in motivating adult learners' erudite and civilized attainment through their series of modern information materials and assistance to achieve their desired developmental objectives;
- Serve as "Communication Bridge" between the government and development agencies and urban dwellers and many others

Conclusion

The paper concludes that managements of both public and private information services existing in Nigeria communities should endeavour to upskill their information delivery personnel always in order to update their knowledge, skills and

competences to achieve the 21st century information services of their staff, and users for societal development. Information is power and essential for building functional individuals who can easily solve his/her personal needs and also contribute to development programmes of the society.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend among others things:

1. Workshops, seminars and conferences should constantly be organized for training and retraining of the information service personnel to enable them stay agile, competent, innovative, and responsive to the changes in their jobs.
2. Government should make sure that public libraries in Nigeria are adequately funded to achieve the desired information purposes in the society.
3. Information should be well planned and organized before dispatching because planned Information dissemination plays a significant role in the quest for achieving the economic and social transformation of the citizenry and the nation at large.
4. Government at all levels should make sure that information services in Nigeria are adequately funded to achieve the desired information purposes of the society.

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