

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF LIBRARY ASSISTANTS IN THREE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

BY

OKERE, OLUCHI O. (Corresponding author)

EMAIL: oluojiok@yahoo.co.uk

+234(0)7067450976

AND

OYENIYI, DAVID A

EMAIL: oyeniyiajibola@gmail.com

+234(0)8059281852

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY,
AKURE, NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

Training and development is an important organizational responsibility. However, in many libraries, management pay only lip-service to the training of their staff especially, the library assistants. This study employed the descriptive survey design to explore the training needs of library assistants in three university libraries in South-West Nigeria, The research used questionnaire administered directly to the respondents to collect data from a sample size of 40 library assistants in the three libraries. The sampling method used was random sampling, 30 out of 40 questionnaires were returned reflecting a response rate of 75%. Frequencies and percentages were used to present the result. The findings showed that most library assistants are at a transitional phase in their career path, indicating a likelihood of high turnover and loss of human capital. Libraries should endeavour to create value for the library assistant position by encouraging training/development and promotion opportunities. Training in computer skills and accessible training opportunities are some of the recommendations of this study.

Introduction

Human Resource Development (HRD) issues in any organization whether in the private or public sector is a very important aspect of management practice.

It is no less so in libraries, even though the library as an institution is a non-profit organization. Training and development of employees is very essential to organizational effectiveness because employees who are trained become better equipped through the enhancement of their knowledge, skills and abilities. Organizations that train their employees are also respected and gain recognition as learning organizations. Stone (2002) points out that this sends powerful signals to employees of the organization's commitment to its people. Training and development of human capital is also a source of motivation and job satisfaction to staff and therefore enhances productivity in organizations (Telia, Ayeni and Popoola, 2007).

In spite of these and other reasons for training and development, organizations especially in developing countries may not always be keen on this aspect of management. In most cases, senior or executive staff are given opportunities, while the junior staff who also need further training are denied such opportunities through inappropriate management policies. Roberts and Kohn (1989) note that CET (Continuing Education and Training) cannot and should not be restricted to professional staff only but should be extended to para-professional, support staff and library assistants because these category of staff also need training not only to enhance their academic/knowledge base but also to be well equipped to cope with change, which is the ever-present feature of modern society.

The library system operates a heavily hierarchical structure. Library assistants are on the lower rungs of the organizational structure and are prone to suffer some disparity. In addition, due to Nigerian unemployment factor, most library assistants are qualified in different academic disciplines ranging from diplomas to degrees in various fields, but because they lack professional qualifications they are tied down to carrying out tasks far below their qualification, training and experience.

Judging by the literature and research level, the career challenges and prospects of the library assistants are of little importance to both researchers and management. This is an unfortunate trend, because library assistants carry out almost all the routine tasks in the library and constitute a sizable population of the academic library workforce. No doubt, the high turnover of this category of staff has managerial implications. Finally in these days of rapid technological changes, when every library's goal is to attain a high status of automation, staff training and development at all levels has become even more necessary than ever.

The thrust of this paper is to assess the training and development needs, trends, prospects and challenges of library assistants in academic libraries, using Southwest Nigeria as a focal point,

Objectives of the study

- To ascertain the training needs of library assistants in academic libraries in South-West Nigeria;
- To determine the training aspirations and preferences of library assistants in academic libraries in South-West Nigeria;
- To identify opportunities for further study, training and development of library assistants;
- To determine the availability and accessibility of support accessible to library assistants;
- To identify the challenges of further training and development among library assistants and
- To recommend ways of enhancing the training and development prospects of library assistants in academic libraries South-West Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research:

1. What are the training needs of library assistants in the three university libraries?
2. What are the training aspirations and preferences of library assistants in the university libraries?
3. Which study, training and development options are available to library assistants?
4. What are the challenges of further training and development among library assistants?
5. How can management enhance the training and development prospects of library assistants in academic libraries?

Literature Review

Literature on training and development for library assistants is quite sparse. Library assistants form a voiceless majority of library personnel. However, as long as staff performance appraisals remain important to management, so also should training of staff be given significant consideration?

While training emphasizes the acquisition of specific skills to improve job performance; development is the acquisition of new knowledge for future job responsibilities. The most important aim of training employees is to ensure that they acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their jobs.

Training and development in organizations is required by both new employees and older ones in the organization. The new employees are introduced to their new assignments while older employees are equipped to be more effective, while preparing them for future promotions and anticipated changes in their job (Fisher, Shoenfeldt and Shaw, 1983). Pugh (1984) notes that training will improve professionalism, ensure better management methods, reduce frustration and enhance job satisfaction. In their own perspective, Fama and Ingrassia (2009) confirm that training programmes for library assistants bring about improved services to patrons and is also a response to budget cuts, changes in technology and the changing needs of patrons. In addition, it enhances the career prospects of the assistants.

Some changes that affect organizations including libraries have been identified to include computer technology, increased consumer expectations, diversity and multi-culturism, increased competition and shift to the knowledge society. Indeed, given the present trends in the university system as a whole and academic libraries specifically where the student population is on an all-time high and information and communication technologies are the preferred medium of accessing information service, library staff of every cadre require to be developed to cope. Abba and Dawha (2009) explore change as a reason for training and development in academic libraries.

A major characteristic of the tasks performed by library assistants is the routine nature of their jobs, which reduces their motivation to work and their application of initiative (Okere, 2009). The qualification requirements for library assistants are also minimal (Secondary School Certificate). In spite of this, most library assistants have higher qualifications such as higher diplomas and degrees. This is mostly a fallout of the unemployment syndrome. A similar study of the training needs of library assistants in two libraries (FUTA and LASU) by Oke and Oguntuase (2010) reflect a high awareness/knowledge of library services and administration by the respondents (library assistants). The scope of responsibility of library assistants as mentioned by the US Department of Labour (2008) in their Occupational Outlook Handbook, include lending and collecting materials (charging and discharging), preparing overdue notices, registration of new patrons, shelving, effecting minor book repairs and location of materials to be lent out. Today, most of these activities are automated, demanding that the assistants should also possess basic computer management skills. Other qualities required of a library assistant are ability to input data accurately and quickly, ability to work with minimal supervision, ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure, ability to work successfully as part of a team and good oral and written communication.

In a study of work motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of professional and non-professional staff of four academic and five research libraries in Oyo State Nigeria, Telia , Ayeni and Poopoola (2007) report that professional and non-professional library personnel have the same perceived work motivation if they are given the work environment and incentives that they need and deserve. They further explain that motivation is required for all class of employees, irrespective of status and qualification.

In a survey of library assistants in Western New York, Buchanan (2005), found that release time, funding and specific training suggestions by supervisors were found to correlate with training participation, The result indicated that library assistants have significant interest in training, especially in aspects related to ICT. In another research on training needs of library personnel in Ibrahim Babangida Library, Federal University of Technology Yola, Nigeria by Abba and Dawha (2007), they found a high desire for further studies by the respondents with 60% of respondents indicating that they need diploma in library studies (DLS), 10% indicated a need for Bachelors in Library Science (BLS), and Masters in Library Science (MLS) by 20 %. Less than 10% of respondents indicating the need for a PhD.

Allenby (1997) and Whetherly (1994) identify three different types of training needs: organizational need, work team needs and individual needs. These reflects the three levels of training needs viz: training to equip staff to meet up with their daily responsibilities effectively, training to improve career prospects of individuals especially those that entered with minimal qualifications and finally training for those who are considering a change in their career path. Maslow's theory of motivation supports the need for individuals to develop themselves so as to satisfy the highest need in his hierarchy of needs model, which is self-actualization, or the fulfillment of one's potential. Ugah and Udoh (2011) agree that consideration of personnel's needs, aspirations and expectations are key to a motivated workforce.

Broadly speaking, training methods maybe on-the-job or off-the-job. On-the-job trainings include delegation, job instruction and secondments, while off-the-job training would involve a training centre such as an agency or university. Van (1996) has identified some methods of training library staff such as attending conferences; vender training; in-house training; hiring newly trained professionals from library schools; continuing education if a library school is nearby. This wide range of training and development needs indicate a need for thorough training needs analysis as suggested by Bartol and Martin (1994). Indeed, every training cycle starts with identifying training needs

before planning, implementation and finally feedback or evaluation. Whetherly (1997) explains that resources expended on identifying the training needs are well spent, since training will be directed to where it is most needed.

Buchanan (2005) indicates in a survey of training needs of library assistants that they placed high value in training due to the demands of technology, continuing education, career advancement and professional development. Obviously, most of the tasks performed by library assistants should be catered for by on the job-training experiences; however, their training should go beyond what they need to perform their immediate tasks.

Cost and budget constraints are some of the reasons why library management does not support further studies of their staff. Owoyemi, Oyelere, Elegbede and Gbajumo-Sheriff (2010) mention other challenges to organizational training as market failure, lack of information, inadequate individual resources but mostly the urge of employers to reduce running costs due to economic downturn. Weaver- Meyers (1990) documented that library schools are unable to fulfill adequately the training needs of library personnel. Their report indicates that the library schools are too few in number and are far too committed to their full-time programmes to cater for part-time population, while library associations are not committed to their training responsibilities.

In conclusion, library staffs as human capital embody the knowledge, skills and abilities of the organization. It is the knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals that create value. The learning culture of any organization can only be promoted if library personnel are retained, developed and motivated through training and development.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of library assistants in three university libraries namely of the Federal University of Technology Akure, Ondo State University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa. Hezekiah Qluwasanmi Library of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The research used questionnaire to collect data from a sample size of 40 library assistants in the three university libraries. Random sampling technique was used to select the sample population. The questionnaire is a mixture of likert scale and Yes/No questions. Forty copies of the questionnaires were distributed in the three libraries and 30 were returned dully filled, representing a response rate of 75%. Table 1 below represents the pattern of questionnaire distribution and the response rate. Frequency count and percentages were used to present the data,

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Library

University Library	Total Population of library assistants in Library	NO of questionnaire distributed	No of questionnaire returned response rate
University Library, FUTA	20	16	13 (81.25%)
Hezekiah Oluwasanmi University Library , OAU Ife	93	20	13 (65%)
Ondo State University of Science and Technology, University library	4	4	4 (100%)
Total	117	40	30 (75%)

Result and Analysis

Table 2 shows the biographical information of the respondents.

Table 2: Biodata of Respondents

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20 <	-	-
	21-30	13	43.3%
	31-40	11	36.7%
	41-50	4	13.3%
	50>	2	6.67%
Gender	Male	22	73.3%
	Female	8	26.7%
Marital Status	Single	7	23.3%
	Married	20	66.6%
	No response	3	10%
Qualifications	School Cert	10	33.3%
	OND	11	36.7%
	Bachelor's Degree	5	16.7%
	Diploma in Librarianship	3	10%
	Masters degree	1	3.3%
Years of Experience	1-3 yrs	16	53.3%
	4-8 yrs	4	13.3%
	9-15 yrs	5	16.7%
	16-26 yrs	3	10%
	26>	2	6.7%

Table 2 shows that a higher number of library assistants are between 21- 30 years and between 31-40 years representing a percentage of 43.3% and 36.7% respectively. Respondents above 40 years old constituted 6 or about 20% of the sample population. School certificate holders were 10 representing

33.3% while OND graduates were 11 or 36.7% and thus constitute majority of the respondents. 16 or 53.3% of the respondents have served in the library for between 1-3 years, constituting the highest percentage. It is clear from the statistics above that most of the library assistants are in a transitional period (ages 21-30, with School Certificate or OND), that is they are awaiting opportunities for further academic development and have served the library for a minimal number of years. Males 22 or 73.3% and married individuals 20 or 66.6% dominate the sample population. A high percentage of library assistants in "the transitional stage" might bring about high turnover unless the assistants see some hope of career advancement. This is not a good trend as it may lead to knowledge gap and loss of human capital. Table 3 presents the areas of training needs as perceived by the respondents.

Table 3: Training Needs of Respondents

S/N	Variable	SA	A	D	SD
a.	There are still aspects of my job responsibilities I do not understand	2 (6.7%)	14 (46.7%)	8 (25.7%)	7 (23.3%)
b.	The skills, knowledge and training I have acquired in my present workplace cannot fetch me a better job elsewhere.	2 (6.7%)	3 (10%)	15 (50%)	10 (30%)
c.	The knowledge, abilities and skills I already possess are higher than my responsibilities	2 (6.7%)	8 (26.7%)	11 (36.7%)	8 (26.7%)
D	The expectation of my supervisor is higher than my abilities.	2 (6.7%)	6 (20%)	11 (36.7%)	9 (30%)
E	My institution/ library is highly innovative, introducing a lot of new methods/ systems of operation.	7 (23%)	19 (63.3%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (6.7%)
f.	I desire to undertake further studies in librarianship	6 (20%)	17 (56.7%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.7%)
g.	My tasks and responsibilities cannot be learnt on the job, I require additional training.	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	12 (40%)	13 (43.3%)
h.	The use of computer have affected my work	3 (10%)	8 (26.7%)	9 (30%)	10 (33.3%)

Table 3 indicates a need to provide more opportunities for training and development as indicated in variables a, c and f. The findings for the first variable (a) in Table 3 indicate a need for more training with respect to tasks

which the assistants do not understand as indicated by 16 assistants or 53.4% of the sample population. This is a high frequency considering the value of the work performed by this group of library personnel. In variable c, 19 or 62.4% disagree that the skill and knowledge they possess is higher than what they need to carry out their jobs, in other words they admit not being adequately equipped in respect to their skills and abilities to handle their tasks. In the same vein, they admit a desire to undertake further studies in librarianship. This is similar to the findings of the research by Abba and Dawha (2007).

Variables e and h with (26) 86.3% and (11) 36.7% respectively indicate that ICT has had some impact on the responsibilities of the assistants in line with the research of Yan (1996) and also suggests that innovations and new methods may necessitate further training. Variables b, d and g lay credence to the fact that many of the library assistants are well-qualified or even over-qualified for the tasks they perform as they believe they can find better jobs elsewhere 35 (80%), the expectations of their supervisors is not higher than their abilities 20 (66.7%) and they do not need additional training to learn their tasks and responsibilities 25 (83.3%). This is in line with the findings of Okere (2009) and Oke and Oguntuase (2010) that most library assistants are well (or even over) - equipped in terms of both qualification and skills to handle their tasks. Table 4 shows the skills of the respondents.

Table 4: Skills Required by the Respondents

Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Computer skills	20	66.7%
Classification skills	14	46.7%
Public relations skills	12	40%
Time management	11	36.7%
Safety	9	30%
Stress management	8	26.7%
Clerical skills	6	20%

In table 4 it is indicated that the highest ranking skill is computer skills, while the least is clerical skill. This underscores the fact that innovation (ICT) has a

large role to play in contemporary library environment and training in ICT will significantly improve the productivity of the library assistants. (Yan, 1996) and (Buchanan, 2005). Fama and Ingrassia (2009) identify broadly the basic skills required for library assistants in their changing roles to include: functional job skills, library basic skills, team skills and Microsoft office skills. Since the library assistant responsibilities are wide ranging and require a great deal of multitasking, there is need to give better attention to stress and time management as necessary skills for library assistants as well.

Clerical skills are required as well, as part of library assistants brief include preparing statistical information for completion of reports and preparing posters, bulletins, and newsletters to promote use of library and materials. Safety skills are also required to cope with security emergencies which appear to be prevalent in many Nigerian libraries (Okere and Taiwo, 2012). Public relations skills ranked second in the list, this is because a large number of library assistants are engaged in activities like circulation and registration activities, assisting library patrons in use of library materials and responding to requests for assistance by patrons, all of which involve interaction with patrons. Table 5 reflects the institutional attitude towards training and development in the three libraries.

Table 5: Training Prospects

S/N	Variable	SA	A	D	SD
a.	There is an operational training and development policy in my work place	5 (16.7%)	13 (43.3%)	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)
b.	My institution has an open and encouraging attitude to staff training and development in terms of further studies/ formal training	5 (16.7%)	15 (50%)	8 (26.7%)	1 (3.3%)
c.	When I joined the library, there was opportunity for on-the job training (induction/orientation) before I started actively	11 (36.7%)	14 (26.7%)	4 (13.3%)	1 (3.3%)
d.	My institution practices rotation (transfer of staff from one unit to the other)	15 (50%)	8 (26.7%)	2 (6.7%)	3 (10%)
e.	There is an office/ committee for staff development and training	7 (23.3%)	13 (43.3%)	6 (20%)	2 (6.7%)
f.	Sponsorship and paid study leave are easily accessible to those who desire further studies	4 (13.3%)	8 (26.7%)	11 (36.7%)	6 (6.7%)
g.	Schools are easily accessible to those who wish to undertake further studies in librarianship	8 (26.7%)	11 (36.7%)	8 (26.7%)	13 (43.3%)
h.	Our appraisal form responses are used effectively to advice and encourage better performance	12 (40%)	14 (46.7%)	2 (6.7%)	10 (33.3%)

Table 5 indicates an organizational structure that moderately encourages training and development of staff. Items a, b, c, d, e and h indicate that organizations support training and development in a number of ways including on-the-job training/ induction/orientation, encouraging further studies, staff rotation and transfers, operational training and development policy and use of the appraisal form to advice. The variable that received the highest "strongly agree" response was staff rotation/transfer 15 or 50%; advice based on appraisal form 12 or 40%; induction/orientation 11 or 36.7%. However

sponsorship and paid study leave and accessibility of library schools for further studies rated poorly. This reflects that libraries have tailored the training programmes and policies to suit the organization needs without considering the personal aspirations and career advancement needs of their staff. A balanced arrangement would take care of the three levels of training needs, that is, training for the effective performance of daily responsibilities, training to improve career prospects of individuals and training for the future. There is also organizational support for training as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Organizational Support

Table 6

	Organization support	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Induction	22	73.3%
2.	Planned rotation	19	63.3%
3.	Sponsorship	14	46.7%
4.	Library school	12	40%
5.	Conferences and seminar	11	36.6%
6.	In -house seminars	7	23.3%
7.	Full time study with pay	6	20%
8.	Part -time study	5	16.7%

presents organizational support accessible to the respondents within the past five years in ranked order. Induction, planned rotation of staff and sponsorship ranked highest with 22 or 73.3%, 19 or 63.3% and 14 or 46.7% respectively, while in-house seminars, full-time study with pay and part time study ranked least with 7 or 23.3%, 6 or 20% and 5 or 16.7% respectively. As mentioned earlier most of the training and development programmes offered by the libraries seem to be geared more towards improving organizational performance. However, sponsorship 14 or 46.7% and library schools 12 or 40% rank fairly high in the list. Libraries need to ensure that education is functional in order to derive the fullest benefit from it. Challenges of training and development were also identified by the research. See Table 7 for the details.

Table 7: Challenges of Training and Development

	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
a.	Management policy	21	69.3%
b.	Distance to library school	18	59.4%
c.	Uncertainty about job prospects	18	59.4%
d.	Cost of training	17	56.1%
e.	Indecision	14	46.2%
f.	Difficulty in effecting conversion in the event of additional qualification	13	42.9%
g.	Lack of organizational support	12	40%
h.	Time constraint	10	33.3%
i.	Lack of information	9	30%
j.	Family responsibilities	8	26.6%

Management policy 21 or 69.3%, distance to library 18 or 59.4% and uncertainty about job prospects 18 or 59.4% were the highest challenges perceived by the respondents. The ten factors listed in Table 7 above have high frequencies/percentages and need to be considered by organizations in any training and development plan. The least factors indicated in the questionnaires were uncooperative attitude (6.67%), lack of interest is 3.3% and age (3.3%). A training needs analysis for library assistants in individual institutions would indicate factors that need to be considered in planning training and development programmes and in designing a policy that will accommodate the needs of all cadres of staff in those institutions. Management policy has a far-reaching effect on the achievement of a well-trained workforce.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of the study generally reflect a need to improve the career advancement opportunities of the library assistants through training and development. Library assistants who carry out most of the routine tasks that keep the system going require to be given better attention especially in the direction of career advancement. This will make the organization more productive because the staff are motivated and the knowledge resource is

sustained. This is one of the important principles of knowledge management that make some 21st century institutions have competitive advantage over others. This suggestion is made in line with the findings of this research. The following are some specific recommendations based on the study.

- Training needs analysis needs to be conducted in individual libraries to understand better the training needs of library assistants;
- Management should adopt a more egalitarian approach towards library assistant training and development through granting of study leave and sponsorship to even library assistants.
- ICT skill should be adopted as a core skill just like cataloguing and classification skills are accepted. Consequently promotion of library assistants with exceptional IT skills should be encouraged.
- Library assistants with sufficient experience and degrees in other fields should not be barred from further promotion because they do not possess library diplomas and degrees, provided they are found to be proficient in some other relevant skills or other skills and qualification. They may thereafter be encouraged to acquire qualifications in librarianship.
- Higher responsibilities can be assigned to library assistant who show exceptional intelligence, knowledge, skills and abilities in order to make librarianship more attractive for career advancement.
- Library schools should create more opportunities for part-time training. Nigerian Library Association should establish training and continuing education opportunities that are flexible so as to make library assistants acquire training and qualifications to move their careers forward.
- Staff appraisal forms should be used to advice staff. Supervisors should encourage and support their assistants to grow beyond their current academic and career level.
- Libraries should look critically at their training and development policies to update them in line with current realities.

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