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Capacity Building for Library and Information Professionals: Core Skills and Competence

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Abstract
This paper discusses the concept of capacity and capacity building as well as the need for training and development for library and information professionals (LIPs). Concept of capacity building is discussed. The need for training and development of library and information professionals is pointed out. *It also highlights the core skills and competencies required of LIPs and the strategies to achieve them.* Challenges of capacity building and possible solutions *are presented. The paper concludes by proffering specific suggestions that library and information professionals can adopt to develop and build their capacity.*

Keywords: Capacity building, Library/Information professionals, skills, competences

1.1 Introduction

It has been realized in every organization including libraries that capacity building is a key factor in coping with changes especially in the digital age where tools and technologies evolve in geometric rate. It is also a fact that the success or failure of any library largely depends on the level and capacity of its staff. Hence, competencies and skills are the basic building blocks of human resource management. In view of these realities, libraries are deeply engaged in training and developing the capacity, competencies and skills of their staff to cope with the trends. The influx of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the rapid adoption of these technologies in library and information centres have greatly justified the need to train and retrain library and information professionals (LIPs) to function effectively in their service delivery.

The quality of library and information professionals in any library will greatly determine how the library or information centre will achieve its vision and mission. According to Mohammed (2003), personnel in the 21st century organizations and establishment, of which libraries and information centres belong, need more education, training, knowledge, skills, ideas, experiences, information and enlightenment now more than ever before in order to cope with the challenges of the time. He further stated that the personnel who continue to improve in their knowledge, experience, education, information ideas and skills acquisition as well as grow positively in their attitudes, behaviours, performance and

productivity in their work place, will eventually make a better employees with stronger feeling of self-satisfaction and fulfillment about their work and assurance of ensuring the achievement of the objectives, goals and mission of their employers and of themselves.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.2 Concept of Capacity Building

Capacity building is a major method often used by organizations including libraries to manipulate and increase the ability and performance of staff. It is interrelated with "training" and "development", most often; it is referred to as 'staff training', 'human resource development', 'personnel or manpower development respectively'. Capacity can be defined as abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviors, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, network/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time (Bolger, 2000). In its broadest interpretation, capacity building encompasses human resource development (HRD). It is based on the concept that education and training lie at the heart of development efforts and that without HRD most development interventions will be ineffective. It focuses on a series of actions directed at helping participants in the development process to increase their knowledge, skills and understandings and to develop the attitudes needed to bring about the desired developmental change. Aina (2004) differentiated among training, education and development thus; Training is the acquisition of technology which permits employees to perform according to standard. It is a discipline or systematic action which causes people to acquire new skills and knowledge and predetermined behaviour. He emphasize

that in training, employees must master the special technology used by their organization before they can perform their task satisfactorily.

Education on the other hand, deals with human development activities which are designed to improve the overall competence of the employee in a specified direction beyond the job currently held. It goes beyond the current job to the next. It entails preparing people for life. Development is concerned with preparing the employees so that they can move with the organization as it develops changes and grows. Development programmes give participants an opportunity to enroll in classes that will enable them to acquire new horizons, new technologies and new viewpoints. Mohammed and Bot (2009) described capacity building as any conscious and deliberate effort, endeavour, facility and opportunity provided to the employees of an organization, establishment and outfit irrespective of their status to improve their skills, attitude, behaviour, experience, ideas knowledge, education and information acquisition with the view to enhance their performance and productivity. Adeniyi (1995) observed that staff training and development is a work activity that can make a very significant contribution to the overall effectiveness and profitability of an organization. Obisi (1996) submitted that capacity building aims at developing competences such as technical, human, conceptual and managerial for the furtherance of individual and organization growth. According to Oguche (2014) the process of capacity building is a life-long and continuous one.

This presupposes that there is no end to training and development if a library and information professional or library is to thrive and remain relevant.

2.3 The Need for Training and Development of Library and Information Professionals

Library and information professionals by default and training are specialized in the act of identifying, selecting, acquiring, processing, organizing and disseminating information to users thereby managing the entire human knowledge system. For LIPs to function effectively especially in the digital era, they must build their capacities, develop their skills and also leverage on opportunities to enhance their competencies. Mohammed and Bot (2009) posit that the basic function, duty and responsibility of a typical library and information centre personnel is to manage the human knowledge through collection and acquisition of all available relevant information resources (print and non-print), organization and manipulation of the information resources, preservation and storage of the information resources and retrieval and dissemination of the relevant information to the right users in the most appropriate package, channel location and time.

Explaining further, they opined that the extent to which the library and information centre staff is able and capable of performing his/her duties and responsibility effectively and efficiently will be a function of several factors which include the acquisition of relevant skills, experiences, ideas education and training. Akinpelu (2008) observed that the challenges thrust upon library and information services by globalization, digitalization and indeed information and communication technology use, has largely necessitated the need for capacity building and utilization initiatives and programmes. The changing scenario of management and leadership styles in libraries, introduction of new technologies to library service delivery, rapid growths of new knowledge, changing trends in library services, communication media, domain/subject knowledge are some of the major factors that will necessitate capacity building of library and information professionals.

2.4 Challenges of Capacity Building and Solutions

The problems of capacity building according to Kayode (2001) differ in natures and yet all have a common denominator, these problems and their solutions include needs to:

1) Increase productivity

2) Improve the quality of work and raise morale

3) Develop new skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes.

4) Use correctly new tools, machines, processes, methods or modifications thereof.

5) Reduce waste, accidents, turnover, lateness, absenteeism, and other overhead costs.

6) Implement new or changed policies or regulations.

7) Fight obsolescence in skills, technologies, methods, products, markets, capital management etc.

8) Bring incumbents to that level of performance which meets (100 percent of the time) the standard of performance for the job.

9) Develop replacements, prepare people for advancement, improve manpower deployment and ensure continuity of leadership.

10) Ensure the survival and growth of the organization.

Emphasizing the relevance of staff development in organizations, Mohammed (2003) stated that personnel in the 21st century organizations and establishment of which libraries and information centers are part of, need more education, training, knowledge, skills, ideas, experiences, information and enlightenment now more than ever before in order to cope with the challenges of the time. Similarly, Mbonu (2004) stated that training helps to give the individuals who have undergone it greater competence personal satisfaction from the experience of being able to exercise new skill, techniques and procedures. The benefit of training are felt and shared by the organization. Trainees can develop enthusiasm towards the process of learning and development and this may in turn help to create a learning program that is more flexible in dealing with and responding to present and future demands.

3.1 Core Skills and Competencies for Library and Information Professionals

Skill is an ability or proficiency in execution or performance, which is required for a person to plan and execute an action designed to achieve some goals or accomplish a particular task. A skilled person has the ability to perform any task successfully. He can face the challenge that occurs in a particular profession because of the social, economic, education and technological changes. Skill can be described as a tool possessed by an individual while Competency is the capability of using a skill. The two variables must be at equilibrium if a library and information professional desire to improve their capacity. Thus in order to cope with the ever-changing library and information science profession, the LIPs must build their capacity and be competent in the following skills.

i. Technological Skills: Technological skills are those skills required to handle information technology related tasks such as computer operation, telecommunication media, creation of online database, maintaining of websites, searching information from internet etc. The need to build capacity in technological skills becomes necessary in the wake of digital library services and globalization. Libraries all over the world are delivering their services online to meet the information needs of clients. Library and Information Professional (LIPs) therefore should develop the following technological skills:

- *Use of Computer and Information Technology Tools:* The library and information professional must have the skill of using computer and other information technology tools properly. Skill of computer operation, application of bar code technology, creation of database and its updating, designing and updating of web pages etc. are required especially for the digital librarians.

- *Use of Internet and Computer Communication Networks:* Skills of handling different computer communication networking architectures and systems such as LAN, MAN, and WAN as well as using of internet and other library related networks like INFLIBNET, CALIBNET, DELNET etc are required for a modern library and information professional (especially those working in IT environment) to tackle the problems and challenges raised in building and maintaining a digital web-based library. Speedy resource sharing and dissemination of information is possible only with the proper computer networking skills.

Moreover, the library and information professionals should have the knowledge of network protocols like TCP/IP, UDP, SMTP, HTTP, FTP etc.

ii. Information Retrieval Skill: With the paradigm shift in user preference of online resources over materials available on the physical shelves, the library and information professionals should have the technological skills of comprehensive retrieval of right information from a particular database in a logical and analytical manner and to provide it to users at the right time. They should be in a position to help their users by providing retrospective searches, ready reference services, bibliographic services, selective dissemination of information services, etc.

iii. Traditional/Basic Skill: Traditional skill includes those basic skills, which are necessary for running and operating a general traditional library. Skill for classification and cataloging of documents, method of indexing and abstracting etc. are also required for the librarian working in the web environment. These traditional skills need to be updated regularly to keep abreast with changes in the profession. With these skills, the librarian can manage the information in proper way and provide them to the users in a right way.

iv. Managerial Skill: Library and Information Professionals as managers of library and information centres should have some basic managerial skills for managing the different sections of an organization like Finance, Human Resource etc. They should build their capacity on how to apply managerial skills in planning, decision-making, motivating etc. Time management skill is one of the important managerial skills required of a good LIP. Total Quality Management (TQM) of library and information centers is mostly reliant on the managerial skill of the LIPs.

v. Communication Skill: The library and information professional act as the mediator between the information users/ seekers and the information resources or information providers. Librarianship is now rightly hauled as public relationship therefore, proper communication skill is also important for the library and information professionals. They should be acquainted with the skill of technical communication writing, as they should have to deal with various groups of people through E-Mail, Bulletin Board, Web Sites, Podcasts, Blogs and other social media.

vi. Preservation Skill: Preservation skills in a digital era are inevitable. LIPs should possess digital preservation skill because all the documents in an e-library are in the digital form but they are not fully secured. Different computer virus can attack the digital library databases and affect them very badly. Hackers can also hack the digital library with their dangerous intelligent skills. Therefore, the library professional should have the knowledge of cryptography, firewall, and different anti-virus software for prevention and preservation of E-Resources.

vii. Personal Skill: The LIPs should possess the skills of being analytical, creative, flexible, reflective, able to deal with a range of users, detective-like, adaptable, responsive to others' needs, enthusiastic and self-motivated. They should also be able to use management tools such as Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental (PESTLE) and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). Nonthacumjane (2011) gave a tabular description of the personal skills that are central to contemporary library work in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Personal Skill Development

S/N	Personal Skill	Description
1	Analytical	Using or skilled in using analysis (i.e. separating a whole intellectual or substantial — into its elemental parts or basic principles)
2	Creative	Having the ability or power to create.
3	Technical	Technical O f or relating to technique or proficiency in a practical skill, for instance acquisition, classification, cataloging, management, services, etc.
4	Flexible	Capable of being changed; elastic: able to adjust readily to different conditions.
5	Reflective	Be devoted to matters of the mind; 'the reflective type'.
6	Able to deal with a range of users	Eligible to provide or give the information and services to the variety of user groups' desired or needed.
7	Detective-like	Able to solve a mystery, generally through a process of discovery.
8	Adaptable	Capable of adapting (of becoming or being made suitable) to a particular situation or use.
9	Responsive to others' needs	Answering, replying or responding; able to receive and respond to external stimuli. Sus ceptible to the feelings of others.
10	Enthusiastic	Having or showing great excitement and interest.
11	Self-motivated	Be motivated to achieve something due to one's own interest.

Source: Nonthacumjane 2011

4.1 Strategies of Capacity Building for Library & Information Professionals

Strategies are usually the measures, approach, scheme, plan of action, schedule, blueprint, master plan or game plan adopted by organizations, institutions, governments or individuals in order to carry out any action for the purpose of accomplishing tasks. Several authors have suggested various methods that can be used by LIPs to improve their skills. For instance, Oribabor (2000), Mutula and Brake (2007), Olaniyan and Ojo (2008), Mohammed and Bot (2009) all suggested in-service, vestibule, on-the job, apprenticeship and orientation as methods for training and development of LIPs. In addition to the aforementioned, the following the avenues can be exploited by LIPs for capacity building;

i. Enrolling for regular or short courses online through the Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) platform or course era.

ii. Participating in specialized training programs/workshops on emerging areas librarianship of interest organised by local, national, regional and international library associations

iii. Formal training programs (full-time or part-time) in recognized and

accredited educational institutions

iv. Scouting for full or partial funded capacity building programs such as the Carnegie sponsored program for young librarians in Africa and the IFLA/OCLC early career programs respectively.

v. Applying for grants/scholarship opportunities such as the full-bright scholarship program and the others.

vi. Attending seminars, symposia, public lectures, roundtables and other for a where performance can be enhanced.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the core skills and strategies mentioned above, LIPs can improve on their capacities and make libraries function effectively thereby priding themselves as competent in delivering library services such as Internet/ database searches and retrieval; electronic delivery of documents regardless of the location; maintaining library's catalog on the web; inter- library loan; reference services either electronically, phone, or at the circulation desk; lending of books and journal; selective dissemination of information (SDI); indexing and abstracting services; publishing and alerting services; and records management and archival functions.

There are lots of opportunities out there for LIPs to develop their skills and competencies. LIPs must be proactive to achieve this feat. The following specific suggestions can be very useful for the skill enhancement of library and information professionals.

1. Library schools should introduce skill-based curriculum providing more provision of specialization.

2. Short term courses for skill enhancement of LIPs should be organized by professional stakeholders like NLN, NLA-IT Section and LRCN.

3. Seminars, workshops, conferences roundtables etc. Should be organized by different sections of NLA and opportunity should be given to the LIPs to participate in capacity trainings outside the library.

4. LIPs should be highly encouraged to develop their professional skills by participating in advanced studies, research programmes, etc.

5. In-house training programs should be vigorously pursued by library and information centers.

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