

Producing a New Brand of Library Educators through Collaborative Teaching: a Position from Developing Country

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Abstract:

Library professionals consists mainly of two major groups- the educators and the practitioners. In some cases the educators are more grounded in theory than practice while the reverse is the case for practitioners. By extension, the transformation engendered by Information and communication technology for library operations and services impacted heavily on the practitioners and spurred them to embrace as well as overcome the challenges posed by ICT. The result is that many library practitioners developed competencies needed not only for traditional library services but for hybrid and later electronic libraries. Hence a new brand of professionals labelled variously as Systems librarian, Automation librarian, ICT librarian, digital librarian etc emerged. Though there was the need for library educators to develop along the line of new competencies, the effort and result of the effort became more glaring and rewarding with library practitioners. By way of borrowing from the already acquired competencies, some library schools are utilizing the competencies of the rebranded practitioners to strengthen their curriculum. By so doing, the former are producing new crop of library educators through this collaborative effort. The paper was designed to unveil the factors that hinder / enhance the development of new competencies by library educators / practitioners in developing countries and how library schools are tapping from the competencies of library practitioners as well as other experts in related fields to produce a new brand of library educators . Recommendations are made on how to ensure continuing evolution of library educator.

Keywords: New educators, Library, Information professionals, Collaboration, Nigeria , Library school, LIS education, New competences, New skills .

Introduction

Before the establishment of library schools in the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, library and information centres personnel need gap were filled with none professionals. Following the establishment of library schools, traditional competences for

acquisition, cataloguing and classification, serials management, documents and archives management as well as public/user services were imparted on library practitioners that earned them bachelors certificate (BLS). With the establishment of twenty five library schools in Nigeria, sufficient manpower are made available with qualifications ranging from diploma through masters to doctor of philosophy degrees. Library and information Centres as well as library schools in Nigeria are at liberty to recruit from these qualified LIS professionals as educators or practitioners. However employers of labour are faced with the challenge of identifying among the teaming graduates those with the necessary competencies. Though educators and practitioners defer in job definitions, both complement each other. The product of the educators provides manpower for libraries. The implication is that the transformation engendered by information and communication technology in the 21st Century has not isolated any of them. They require the generic/core set of workplace/discipline specific /transferable skills/key competences (Atlay & Harris 2000, Oliver & McInghlln, 2001) and subject specific/control/subject matter/discipline knowledge to attain their professional callings. Library practitioners are constantly challenged to provide state-of-the-art information services to their communities. Consequently they are expected to adapt to changes in service delivery informed by evolving technology including automatic approach to operators and services, digital library (Universities UK), social media services (Patridge, Lee and Munro 2010) and other information technology driven services which in effect to demonstrates their continuing relevance to their employers. Conversely, it has been acclaimed and corroborated by Burnett (2013) that “Library and Information Science Schools in many developing countries are not keeping abreast of the rapidly changing digital environment and are facing new knowledge and skills demands from employers”. This justifies the position of practitioners as presented by Dougherty (2006) that the educators do not prepare students adequately for their first job since they do not keep current with new tools, techniques and software. The result is that the expected competent manpower from library schools is not provided.

Hence library schools in Nigeria have taken some steps to bridge the gap created due to some challenges faced in the course of library and information science education. The essence is to produce continually new band of library educators. Therefore, the paper was designed to determine the factors that hinder and or enhance development of new competencies by practitioners and educators and the approach to producing new brand of educators in Nigerian library schools.

Method

Quantitative approach was adopted in the collection of information needed for the paper. Thirty educators from twenty five accredited Library schools and forty library practitioners were interviewed to collect data for the paper. The requested information was focused at determining their views on the competences development of educators and library practitioners. Interestingly, the practitioners were of the view that the educators are not abreast of 21st century librarianship. A few of the educators refuted the later, while 80% of them opined that the practitioners were more advanced especially in the area of skills for the 21st Century.

Factors That Enhance or Hinder Library and Information Professional Competences Development in Nigeria.

Data gathered during the interactions with the interviewees are clustered as individual, employer/Institutional, professional association /regulatory bodies and International sponsoring bodies' factors. It was generally agreed that the practitioners trend to stake more in development of new competences than their educators' counterpart hence the former posses more skills than the later.

1. Personal/Individual Factors

According to the respondents, some of the factors which are individual specific that aid/hinder library and information professionals to enhance their skills revolve around motivation and enthusiasm, evolving technology challenges, personal desire for self development, reluctance to allow subordinates deputise in management responsibility as well as networking and collaboration capacity.

Motivation and Enthusiasm

The practitioners are desirous of providing enhanced services to their users, gain greater competences that will also earn them visibility and recognition in their Institutions as well as among this peers. Conversely, the educators are not enthusiastic in the area of acquiring new competencies. The educators' job definition is not practical service oriented and often their recognition, visibility and popularity are not exclusively dependent on their competences.

Evolving Technology Challenges

The practitioners are challenged by the evolving technology which may likely threaten their jobs in an event of negligence. Consequently they exposed themselves to constant continuing professional development (CPD) through workshops, conferences, and grant sourcing. Conversely educators' teaching is based on the curriculum some of which are not regularly reviewed/updated. Thus according to a practitioner "the educators are still in their Adamic nature ". Accordingly their need for conferences, workshops and other CPD programmes are not of primary importance. The resulting and evolving competences tend to elude the educators which invariably affect their products.

Desire for Self Development

Majority of the practitioners engage themselves in self sponsorship for training and self teaching through personal reading and practical activities. The educators do not bother engaging in self development of any form since it is of little or no consequence to their continuing existence as library educators. Hence the educators' desire and motivation to source for, pay or engage in CPD is usually low.

Reluctance to Allow Subordinates Deputise in Management Responsibility

It was also advanced that the practitioners are at more liberty to allow their subordinates stand in for them while they engage in CPD than the educators who are very reluctant to relinquish their responsibility to others for CPD.

Networking and Collaboration Capabilities

Practicing Librarians were shown to network and collaborate better in the area of CPD than the educators. The educators only seem to collaborate at institutional levels during accreditations. Individual networking in form of CPD is almost none existence to the educators. Rather they engage in instant rewarding endeavour like pastime and adjunct teaching in diverse institutions, by so doing they have little or no time for CPD.

2. Employer/Institutional Factors

Library and information Science (LIS) professionals are highly challenged in the development of competences by many institutional. Some of these factors include:

Curriculum Update

The evolution of competences required by LIS professional employers justifies the need for continuing update of curriculum. Many library schools do not update the curriculum as expected. The result is that library educators do not consider it necessary to engage in CPD contrary to the constant demand made of practitioners by changing practices and users need.

None Supervision and Monitoring of Pedagogy

Many institutional management do not provide a mechanism for pedagogical monitoring or supervision. The result is that some educators reduced the content of updated curriculum to their own level of competencies. “A lot of cheating occurs during teaching since the educators are not supervised. For the practitioners, new users demand requires new skill a consequential yardstick for measuring credibility and acceptability. The practitioner must develop according to the needs of the community of library users”.

Excess Commitment to Institutional Activities

Educators are often challenged by excessive teaching, supervision and even management responsibilities. For this reason many are not opportune to engage either in self sponsored or collaborative CPD. In some cases employees provide practitioners with in-house training on wanted competencies. The later are permitted to attend some of the CPD at the expense of the educators who engage themselves in round the clock teaching and supervision of plethora programmes.

3. Regulatory/Professional Bodies

In Nigeria the regulatory bodies for library school include National University commission, for University, National Board for Technical Education for Polytechnics and National Board for Colleges of Education for Colleges of Education. Also involved in the regulations of library and information professionals is the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) which determines who a professional is. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) with its many sections is the only professional association umbrella for library and

information professionals in Nigeria. The interviewees were of the view that the role of these bodies influences competences development in Nigeria.

Obsolete Curriculum

The regulatory body have not provided enabling environment to enrich the curriculum with evolving competences. The educators are therefore not challenged to acquired new competences “ If content does not change, pedagogy need not change and the status quo competences still holds”.

Certification of Professionals

The LRCN have not enforced the need to withdraw certificate where a professional has not engaged in CPD. Consequently, the educators who may be unresponsive to evolving competences are justifiably in the services of their employers. Hence they are disposed to teach the old traditional library competencies which they are familiar with. “Practitioners must engage in CPD to seem relevant”.

Indifference to Professional Development Programme

The annual conference organise by NLA has not given prominence to an important aspect of CPD – skill. Furthermore, the various sections among which is Nigerian Library and Information Science Educators (NLISA) section have not be mandated to insist on well planned mandatory CPD programme. The result is that the educators tend not to attend the CPD notwithstanding their relevance to education and practice. Hence the educator tends to be indifferent to the programme.

4. Grant Providing / Sponsoring Bodies

Respondents were of the view that majority of the intended CPD were designed to benefit only the practitioners. In most cases, grants and sponsorship tend to favour only the practitioners. In effect practitioners have leverage over the educators whose competences acquisition is restricted to reading, conferences (Knowledge) and a few trainings that are open to all LIS professionals. Typical of this were some international CPD programmes like Mortenson Centre for International Library Programs University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC), Galilee International Management Institute and Carnegie Continuing Professional Development Programme where majority of the sponsorships were reserved for LIS practitioners.

Approach to Produce New Brand of Educators in Nigerian Library Schools

In confirmation of the views of Burnett (2013), Doughety (2006), kavulya (2007) Amunga and Khayesi (2012) who identified the need to upgrade library education especially in developing countries due to some of the earlier identified challenges, the respondents opined that library schools in Nigeria have taken some steps to ensure the continuing production of new brand of educators. Some of these approaches are:

Engaging Library Practitioners as Associates/ Part-time Lecturers

The educators were unanimous in their view that some practitioners are more advanced than the educators in the evolving 21st as well as traditional competences especially in the area of skills. To ensure the transfer of the practitioners' competences, they are engaged to teach as associates, on part-time bases or on parallel appointments in the library schools. Such associates assist both in teaching and review of library school curriculum . This approach in producing highly competent practitioners and educators in library schools is practised in University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka and many other library schools in Nigeria. This corroborates the views of Crowe et al (2007), Burnett (2013), and Kavulya (2007), of the need for library schools to collaborate in teaching and practical activities with practitioners who have demonstrated mostly of the evolving competences.

Engaging Information Technology (IT) Professional/Technician for Students' Tutorials

Competences needed by LIS professionals today is basically technology based. The desired to capacitate the students with a view to strengthen technology competences for the future prompted some library schools to engage IT professionals informally to provide tutorials for their students.

Exposing Students Though Internship and Industrial Attachment(IT) To Industries and Libraries

Though library educators boast of providing the students with sufficient knowledge for future job engagement, skill deficiency is augmented with the opportunities for internship and industrial attachments in libraries and industries. Such exposure strengthens the skill and ensure modern competences transfer from the application perspective as proposed by Ocholla (2008) and Lukwale et al (2013) needed to establish links with industries and strengthen students field work internship. This helps achieve discipline knowledge and generic capabilities (Partudge and Hallam 2004).

Providing Students with New-Competences Related Assignments

Some library schools are exposing student to new competences related assignments. These are provided as course of study like 'contemporary librarianship, Seminars' etc or mere assignments in the areas of automation, website development, digital libraries, social media etc. Students in this case are encouraged to liaise with experts as referrals. In the course of such assignments, these competences are extended thereby strengthen them for tomorrow's job.

Importing Competences from Postgraduate Students

Library schools in Nigeria admit students with a degree in IT related discipline including computer Science, electrical and electronics engineering, information technology etc. Some library practitioners with long standing experience in IT application in libraries are also give postgraduate admission to study library and information science. Educators tend to work closely with these groups of students in lecture preparations as well as during practical classes. By so doing, the educators sharpen and strengthen their own competences. This also

helps to enhance educators capacity in teaching the students. The students are therefore well prepared to face evolving job market.

Providing IT Related Elective and Subletting IT Related Courses to Experts

Many library schools in Nigerian have reviewed their curricula to include IT related courses as compulsory electives. Students are encouraged to choose from the electives. By such arrangement, the students are expose to the competences which are novel to traditional librarianship. Library schools have also introduced some courses which they teach in collaboration with experts from other department. The approach has engendered knowledge and skill transfer from the expert to the students and ultimately to the library schools. Hence new knowledge is created as affirmed by Malhan (2011).

Recruiting Graduating Students Who Demonstrated High Level IT Competences in Library Schools

The Exposure given to students in library schools through the aforementioned approaches ultimately produce some high flying IT competent graduates. The schools do not stop at anything until they are recruited as educators . They are variously termed new brand library educators, ICT compliant educators, IT lecturers etc. The new brand of educators are not only familiar with IT but are also grounded in theories and principles of librarianship. The approach to IT/ICT teaching differ significantly from experts domicile in other IT related departments whose knowledge of librarianship is shallow or not available.

Conclusion

Transformation in Library and Information Science competences engendered by the adoption of Information and Communication Technology aimed at leveraging the principles and theories of librarianship has impacted on educators and practitioners. The professionals continue to justify their efforts to towards continuing professional development. The demands of the job as well as other extraneous challenges tend to short-change the educators effort. A new approach was adopted in the education of the would be educators and practitioners through collaboration and partnership with libraries, industries, related departmental/industrial experts as well as recruitment of the new brand graduates as teachers. Consequently, the competence gap in library education is thus bridged.

Implications/Recommendations

Isolation is not a virtue while unity is strength. It is evident that library schools which have taken steps to involve the employers of their product – libraries and other industries tend to understand their needs and adopt their expectations. Success stories of library schools that adopted the identified approach to produce new brand of educator implies that it works and should be adopted by other schools. This will ensure unity of purpose and avert the production of unemployable library information professionals.

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