

Continuing professional development and innovative information service delivery in Nigerian libraries: Inhibitors and the way out

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This study examined the various forms of continuing professional development (CPD) that Nigerian academic librarians have participated in during the last five years with a view to ascertain the various ways in which skills acquired from such programmes had enabled innovative and creative information service delivery. The survey method of investigation was adopted for the study. The findings revealed that the librarians participated in very few forms of CPD programmes and the few skills acquired during participation in the CPD programmes are minimally utilized in providing creative and innovative services in the library. The major inhibitors to being innovative and creative with the acquired skills were identified to be: epileptic Internet access due to low bandwidth, lack of computing facilities to put the skills into practice in the library, irregular power supply and, not working in the section where the skill can be put into use. The study therefore recommends that librarians should begin to explore other CPD programmes such as participation in webinars as well as making use of online training sites and YouTube tutorials. It also recommends that more skills in the areas of digitization, real-time referencing, teleconferencing, and networking management should be acquired by the librarians if they want to remain relevant while the university and library management should provide adequate number of computers and also upgrade the Internet bandwidth in the libraries to allow for its effective utilization in services creation and provision by the librarians.

Keywords: Continuing professional development; Librarians; Service delivery; Skills acquisition; Creativity; Innovativeness; Academic libraries; Nigeria.

Introduction

Continuing professional development (CPD) is usually driven by several factors which include an appreciation of the information challenges encountered by users in the electronic information environment and the desire to acquire relevant skills necessary for responding effectively to the information needs of the users. CPD which simply means the additional training that professionals go through in order to improve upon skills, understand new techniques, and maintain previously learned knowledge could also be seen as an enabler to creativity and innovativeness.

Creativity and innovativeness are sometimes used interchangeably, though they contain significant differences. While creativity has to do with the ability to generate new possibilities or alternatives by viewing things from a perspective different from others, innovativeness has to do with introducing changes and new ideas on how an already existing thing can be carried out. Creativity according to Fox and Fox¹ is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may

be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others. It simply means “bringing something new into being”. Innovativeness on the other hand means introducing changes that require significant adaptation or transformation of organizational or individual behaviour². It connotes having new ideas about how an already existing thing can be done with greater result.

The ability of librarians to provide creative and innovative services in this electronic era could depend on the extent to which they expose themselves to CPD programmes. This is because formal classroom instruction according to Pan and Hovde³ covers primarily generalized knowledge about the fundamental concepts and theories of the library systems and operation. The curriculum is usually centered on preparing the librarian with the knowledge and skills necessary for performing the traditional roles of the library. It is worthy to note that Library and Information Science (LIS) degree basically does the ideal job of preparing librarians for the role of providing services in assisting patrons with

the process of accessing needed information in the library. However, today's information society require much more than the knowledge gained from the curriculum, hence the need for continuing professional development. Librarians in the present era are required to provide innovative and creative remote services such as online information search and communication as well as organize webinars and trainings for their patrons.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the adoption of the exploding Internet and media technologies into library services have caused expansion and dramatic changes in information provision and communication processes. To keep in tune with these changes and flow with trends and developments in the field, library and information science professionals need to train and re-train themselves especially in technological skills acquisition. It can be argued that more than ever before, there is now a serious global interest in the area of creative and innovative library and information services delivery as well as in continuing professional development generally. Conferences (both national and international), seminars and workshops have bemoaned and catalogued the multifaceted consequences of refusing to acquire the relevant skills necessary for innovativeness and creativity in library and information services delivery. According to Cooke⁴, the most productive and effective way for librarians to keep up with these changes brought about by the adoption of ICT in library services is to seek out professional development opportunities.

It is also gratifying to note that nowadays, the library associations at the international, national and state levels are at the forefront of organizing programs aimed at developing professionals. In Nigeria specifically, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) has emulated the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in creating specialized subject oriented Sections such as: Cataloguing and Classification Section, Information Technology Section, Media Libraries Section, Medical Libraries Section, Academic Libraries Section, Government Libraries Section, and School Libraries Section. This segmentation was carried out with the primary aim of having an avenue for the provision of specialized programs and information targeted specifically at each group. Workshops and trainings are intermittently organized for the sections with the theme and sub-themes covering new trends

in the specific area of the concerned sections. More so, the United States Information Resource Center situated in Nigeria has been organizing free trainings aimed at developing LIS professionals in the areas of providing innovative and creative services to the library users. At the international level, the Online Computerized Library Catalogue (OCLC) as well as several other organizations with interest in librarianship has been organizing free webinars and various other online training programs for library practitioners.

Exposure to these opportunities notwithstanding the usual in-house training organized by employers is bound to equip LIS professionals with the necessary skills required for creative and innovative service. Conversely, personal observation as well as regular statements by professional colleagues has shown that majority of LIS professionals in Nigeria possess inadequate skills to enable innovativeness and creativity in their services delivery notwithstanding these CPD opportunities available to them. Without empirical investigation, it might be difficult to identify the causative factors of the issue at hand. This problem therefore necessitated the present study that focuses to empirically establish the cause of the problem and also proffer solutions based on the outcome of the study.

Literature review

Continuing professional development is generally seen as the process by which professionals improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and also develop the personal qualities required in their professional practice. According to Marchington and Wilkinson⁵, continuing professional development is the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. CPD, in the context of this work, is defined as the ongoing training and education that practicing librarians embark on with a view to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, acquire new technical skills necessary for creativity and innovativeness, and keep up to date with the rapid and numerous changes taking place in the information world. It results from the commitment to being professional and continuously seeking to improve oneself.

CPD according to Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland⁶ involves an ongoing cyclical process of continuous quality improvement which allows professionals to learn and develop to meet their own

personal and professional needs and the needs of their patrons. It focuses on self-directed, ongoing, systematic and outcome-oriented approach to learning and professional development. A CPD system can either be voluntary, with activity undertaken as and when the professional demands it, or mandatory, where compliance is required by law or the professional registering bodies.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development⁷ emphasized that CPD should:

- Be continuous and that professionals should always be looking for ways to improve performance
- Be the responsibility of the individual learner to own and manage
- Be driven by the learning needs and development of the individual
- Be evaluative rather than descriptive of what has taken place
- Be an essential component of professional and personal life, never an optional extra.

According to Institute of Hospitality⁸, CPD enables a professional to:

- Update knowledge and skills in existing and new areas of practice
- Keep professional qualifications up-to-date
- Raise one's profile through certification and networking, making oneself more marketable to future employers
- Increase competence in a wider context benefiting both personal and professional roles
- Demonstrate commitment to the profession
- Gain greater job satisfaction
- Obtain new and improved skills - making challenging tasks easier
- Increase skills, knowledge and confidence in one's professional abilities
- Have talents recognized by employers

The world in which all professionals practice is changing. In order for a professional to stay abreast of development within his or her field, continuing professional development is crucial. This is in consideration of the fact that global competition has never been more intense as is being witnessed presently. Clients are becoming more knowledgeable and more demanding. According to Ukachi⁹, library profession is now at a crossroad as traditional library

services appear to be on the decline while new technology-based services are on the rise. Technology has continued to affect all aspects of our lives hence information and information sources which is the key product marketed by libraries, now come in different formats and are as well communicated via plethora of medium. These developments come with new opportunities: new clients, new markets, new areas of practice and new methods of working. The changes demand ever-evolving knowledge, skills and understanding, and an increasing demonstration of commitment to the provision of creative and innovative services. The ACRL Statement on Professional Development¹⁰ affirmed that professional development is essential for academic librarians to keep current with skills, knowledge, and competencies in rapidly changing times.

Obviously, all library professionals, regardless of departmental affiliation, face an imperative to upgrade their knowledge, improve their skills, and to adapt and broaden service models. Pan & Hovde³, emphasized that they have no other option if they wish to maintain a role both in the profession and, by extension, in the vitality of the library as an institution. Hurych¹¹ submits that professional development is as an essential obligation when he states that education for the contemporary professional no longer ends with diploma, if it ever did. He reiterated that it has been recognized that continuing education strengthens not only knowledge and skills necessary for competent performance but also values and attitudes necessary for the service orientation of a profession.

Professional development benefits both the individual and the institution. For the individual, the ongoing process of acquiring new information and skills promotes job competencies for performance upgrades and promotion. Block & Kelly¹² highlighted that on the psychological level, heightened competency may reduce job-related stress and increase interest thus, promoting job satisfaction.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development⁷ enumerated the following as the benefits of CPD:

- Helps to build confidence and credibility as you can see your progression by tracking your learning.
- Enables you to earn more by showcasing your achievements. A handy tool for appraisals.

- Helps you achieve your career goals by focusing on your training and development.
- Enables you to cope positively with change by constantly updating your skill set.
- Be more productive and efficient by reflecting on your learning and highlighting gaps in your knowledge and experience.
- Helps maximize staff potential by linking learning to actions and theory to practice.
- Organizations link it to appraisals.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify the various forms/models of CPD that Nigerian academic librarians have participated in during the last five years;
2. To find out the skills acquired from participation in those CPD programs;
3. To establish if skills and knowledge acquired are being put to use and the areas of the professional practice it has made them to be innovative and creative; and
4. To identify inhibitors in situations where acquired skills are not being put into practice.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the study population. The population of the study which also formed the sample size comprises of all the seventy-five (75) librarians working in two University Libraries (University of Lagos Library and Kenneth Dike Library of University of Ibadan) in Nigeria. The choice of the Librarians in these two University libraries was made following the fact that they are two of the outstanding

first generation university libraries in Nigeria notable for following trends in the profession, especially, in the area of ICT adoption in library services. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Data collected was analyzed in tables, using percentages and frequency counts.

Analysis

A total number of 75 questionnaires were distributed to the two university libraries under study (University of Lagos and University of Ibadan libraries). Altogether, a total of 68 questionnaires were returned while 65 were found usable as the remaining 3 were not properly filled.

Participation in CPD programs

Table 1 indicates responses on the various forms/models of CPD that respondents have participated in during the last 5 years.

Table 1 reveals that in-house training got the highest participation rate of 100%. The other models of CPD that are highly patronized by the respondents include: attending conferences & seminars 61 (94%), workshops 46 (71%), and attending training course(s) within Nigeria 46 (71%). The result also indicated that only 8 (12%) out of the entire 65 respondents had attended training course(s) outside Nigeria. Other means that are not well utilized include: Participation in webinars 18 (28%), exploring YouTube tutorials on skills acquisition 21 (32%) and making use of Online training sites 22 (34%).

Skills acquired from CPD programs

The respondents were requested to indicate the skills they have been able to acquire from participation in the various CPD programs. Their response is given in Table 2.

Table 1--Forms/ Models of CPD

Sl. no.	Forms/ Models of CPD	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Attended training course(s) outside Nigeria	8	12	57	88
2	Attended training course(s) within Nigeria	46	71	16	29
3	Workshop attendance	46	71	16	29
4	Participation in webinar	18	28	47	72
5	Explored YouTube tutorials on skills acquisition	21	32	44	68
6	In-house training	65	100	-	-
7	Acquired higher degree in the area of the profession	35	54	30	46
8	Peer coaching/mentoring	36	55	29	45
9	Attended conferences & seminars	61	94	4	6
10	Made use of Online training sites	22	34	43	66

Table 2--Skills acquired from CPD programs

Sl. no.	Skills acquired	SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Social media and networking skills	16	25	28	43	21	32	0	0
2	Digitization skills	0	0	25	38	26	40	14	22
3	Research skills	5	8	28	43	18	28	14	22
4	Information searching skills	2	3	39	60	19	29	5	8
5	Online cataloguing skills	5	8	38	58	16	25	6	9
6	Real-time referencing skills	0	0	2	3	58	89	5	8
7	Web page creation skills	0	0	2	3	63	97	0	0
8	Uploading and downloading skills	2	3	2	3	30	46	7	11
9	Teleconferencing skills	1	2	5	8	59	91	0	0
10	Computer programming skills	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Computer security knowledge	0	0	3	5	62	95	0	0
12	Document conversion skills	0	0	16	26	49	75	0	0
13	Software installation	2	3	20	31	39	60	4	6
14	Network management skills	0	0	4	6	61	94	0	0

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 3--Skills acquired and utilization

Sl. no. Professional areas	SA		A		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1 Use of social media in the discharge of library services	0	0	12	18	36	55	17	26
2 Use of social media for personal purposes	22	34	43	66	0	0	0	0
3 Using Survey Monkey for research and data collection purposes	5	8	1	2	53	82	6	9
4 Online cataloguing	3	5	57	88	5	8	0	0
5 Conducting online information search for my library users	0	0	6	9	59	91	0	0
6 Conversion of files from one format to another (eg. PDF to Word)	0	0	3	5	50	77	12	18
7 Creation of website	0	0	1	2	40	62	14	22
8 Organizing webinars, teleconferencing and online training for the library users	0	0	0	0	25	38	40	62
9 Software installation for the management of library resources	0	0	0	0	16	25	49	75
10 Rendering network management services in my library	0	0	2	3	12	18	51	78

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 indicates that information searching skills was the most acquired skill (60% indicated “Strongly agree” while 3% indicated “Agree”) followed by social media and networking skills (43% indicated “Agree” while 25% indicated “Strongly agree”), online cataloguing (58% indicated “Agree” while 8% indicated “Strongly agree”) and research skills (43% indicated “Agree” while 8% indicated “Strongly agree”). Real-time referencing skill and web creation skills got the lowest scores of 3% each while computer programming skill is not possessed by any of the respondents.

Utilization of acquired skills

To establish the application of the acquired skills and knowledge gained and the areas of professional

practice it has made the librarians to be creative and innovative, the respondents were provided with items as given in Table 3 in the questionnaire and requested to indicate the options that are applicable to them. Their responses are presented in the Table 3.

The responses as indicated in the Table 3 shows that online cataloguing (88% for “Agree” and 5% for “Strongly agree”) as well as use of social media for personal purposes (66% for “Agree” and 34% for “Strongly agree”) are the only two ways in which the acquired skill is being put to innovative and creative use. Use of social media in the discharge of library services was accepted by only 18% of the respondents while conducting online information search for users was accepted by 9% of the entire study population.

Table 4—Inhibitors to utilizing the skills in service delivery

Sl. no.	Inhibitors	SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Not working in the section where the skill can be put into use	5	8	18	28	30	46	12	18
2.	Lack of computing facilities to put the skills into practice in the library	10	15	27	42	15	23	13	20
3.	Epileptic Internet access due to low bandwidth	13	20	28	43	24	37	-	-
4.	Irregular power supply	7	11	18	28	40	61	-	-
5.	Fear of making mistakes	0	0	0	0	53	82	12	18
6.	My boss disapproves/not receptive to the use of the skill	0	0	0	0	60	92	0	0

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Inhibitors to utilizing the skills in services delivery

Responses on inhibitors to utilizing the skills in the library's services delivery is given in Table 4.

Table 4 reveals that the major inhibitors are: Epileptic Internet access due to low bandwidth (43% for "Agree" and 20% for "Strongly agree"), lack of computing facilities to put the skills into practice in the library (42% for "Agree" and 15% for "Strongly agree"), irregular power supply (28% for "Agree" and 11% for "Strongly agree") and, not working in the section where the skill can be put into use (28% for "Agree" and 8% for "Strongly agree"). Fear of making mistakes and their boss disapproving/not being receptive to the use of the skill was not indicated by the respondents as part of the inhibiting factors to utilizing the skills in services delivery.

Summary of findings

1. The most conspicuous forms of CPD that these librarian participate in are in-house training followed by conferences and seminars.
2. The obvious skills acquired by their participation in these programs are: Information searching skill, Social media and networking skill and online cataloguing skill.
3. The acquired skills are not being put to effective use in the services delivery in the libraries. Hence it has had minimal influence on the librarian's job creativity and innovativeness.
4. The major problems inhibiting their being innovative and creative with the acquired skills are: epileptic Internet access due to low bandwidth, lack of computing facilities to put the skills into practice in the library, irregular power supply and, not working in the section where the skill can be used.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are being suggested;

1. The librarians should begin to explore other CPD programs such as participation in webinars as well as making use of Online training sites and YouTube tutorials. These are available usually for free. Institutions and the professional associations should also support the librarians in their professional training endeavours.
2. Librarians should endeavour to acquire more skills in the areas of digitization, real-time referencing, teleconferencing, and network management skills in order to remain relevant and be competent to provide creative and innovative services in their libraries.
3. The university and library management should provide adequate number of computers and also upgrade the Internet bandwidth in the libraries to allow for its effective utilization in services creation and provision by the librarians.
4. Library management should also ensure that librarians are put or made to work in the Sections/Units where their skills and knowledge would enhance the job functions and not wasted by under-utilizing them.

Conclusion

Continuing professional development is very essential for any professional who wants to remain relevant in this fast changing economy. However, this study had established that librarians in University of Lagos and Kenneth Dike Library of University of Ibadan participated in very few CPD programs. It has also found that the a few skills acquired during participation in the CPD programs are minimally

utilized in providing creative and innovative services in the library. The study therefore concludes that implementing the recommendations made in this study would enable the librarians to acquire the necessary relevant ICT skills and also utilize same in providing creative and innovative services in their libraries.

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