Short Course Provision For Library Personnel In Nigeria

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Of all human resources available to any organisation, employees are the most important not only because the services they render to the organisation are peculiar but because they are continuous. The training and retraining of employees usually referred to as Human Resource Development (HRD) should, therefore, be a matter of utmost concern to every organisation. HRD has grown exponentially in Nigeria during this decade. This growth is manifested in the number and variety of seminars, conferences, workshops, and short courses that are presently being offered by government agencies and private practitioners in the field.

Some writers who have examined the personnel problems of Nigerian Libraries have recommended that Libraries pursue vigorous in-service training programmes so as to ensure a steady flow of trained personnel. Indeed, in-service training has become a major means of offsetting the problems created by the high turn-over that exists in the non-professional cadre and the acute shortage of professionals. Workshops and courses are being continuously organised by Librarians to keep themselves and other library staff abreast with the changes in their jobs. This paper examines the problems and preferences of libraries in the provision of short courses as in-service training and the prospects of co-operation so as to benefit the poorly staffed libraries which are unable to organise courses for their staff.

The dearth of adequately trained professional and non-professional staff for Nigerian libraries has seriously handicapped library services. Professional staff are in greater demand owing to the rapid expansion of library services throughout the country. In order to have a proper perspective of the staffing position in libraries the inadequacy of which necessitated this study, libraries were asked to indicate their staff strength.

	Coll. & Univ.	Public	Special	All Libs.
Professional Staff	24.2%	15.6%	29%	20.3%
Non-Professional Staff	75.8%	84.4%	71%	79.7%

There responses summarized above shows a ratio ranging from 1:2.4 to 1:5.4. These ratios depend on the category of staff included as non-professionals. The situation is probably only comparable to what obtained in Britain in the 1950s.

With professional staff strengths which grew to the various strengths indicated above in 1978/79, libraries have been organising courses. This is

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shown in their answer to the question: Did your library, Organisation or Unit organise a training course for your staff or staff of other organisations engaged in Library, Information or Documentation work within the past five years (1974/75 - 1978/79)? The response was as follows:-
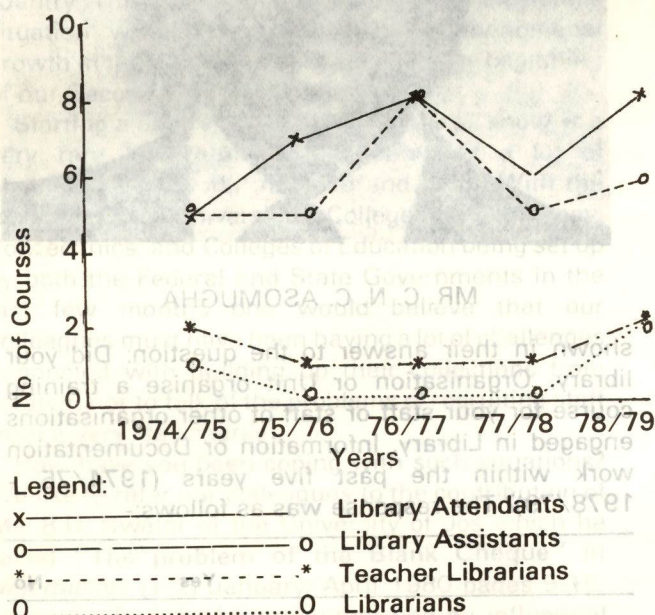
	Yes	No
College & University Libraries	39%	61%
Public Libraries	100%	0%
Special Libraries	0%	100%
All Libraries	43%	57%

Whereas special libraries did not offer any courses, all public libraries did offer one kind of course or the other for their staff. It appears that special libraries are not in a position considering their staff strength to organise courses for their staff. This is where the library schools, library associations and other priviledged libraries could offer assistance. Of all responding libraries that offered courses, College and University libraries constituted 75%. Special libraries need to explore the possibilities of benefiting from these courses. In the table below the courses organised each year for various categories of staff are summarized.

	1974/75	75/76	76/77	77/78	78/79
Library Attendants	38.5%	38.5%	47.1%	41.7%	33.3%
Library Assistants	38.5%	53.8%	47.1%	50.0%	44.5%
Teacher-Librarians	15.4%	7.7%	5.8%	8.3%	11.1%
Librarians	7.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%

The table clearly indicates that no courses have been organised for Librarians from 1975/76 through 1977/78. Although a few librarians attended the

Summer Course in Wales during this period, the bulk of our librarians did not undergo any retraining. As seen from the graph below, the number of short-term courses offered reached a peak in 1977/78 for some categories of staff and during the 1978/79 the momentum could not be maintained. It is possible that most libraries that organised or made proposals for organising courses for their staff during 1978/79 did not report about them in their response. Whatever might have been responsible for the reduction in the number of courses offered, it is essential that the courses which have been offered before be continued unless they did not meet the needs of our libraries.

Legend:
x————————x Library Attendants
o————————o Library Assistants
- - - - - - - - Teacher Librarians
0·············0 Librarians

Since 1974/75 some libraries have organised courses regularly especially for Library Attendants and Assistants as shown in the table below:-

Type of Course	Organiser	Frequency
(a) Bindery Assistants' Course	ABU, Zaria, Kashim Ibrahim Lib.	Annually since 1974/75
(b) ISBD(M),(S) Workshop for Libraries & Library Science Students	National Library of Nig., Lagos	1974/75 only
(c) Induction Course		
(i) - for Library Attendants/Assistants	Kano State Library	Annually since 1976/77
(ii) -for Teacher Librarians	Oyo State Library	1974/75 only
(d) In-service Course		
(i) - Advanced (for older Library Assistants)	Univ. of Jos Library	1976/77, 1977/78
	National Lib. of Nigeria, Lagos	Annually since 1977/78
	Bendel State Library, Benin	Annually since 1974/75
(ii) -Elementary (for New Library Assistants, Clerical Assistants	Univ. of Jos. Library	1976/77, 1977/78
	Kwara State Library, Ilorin	Annually since 1974/75
(iii) Typists	National Lib. of Nigeria, Lagos	Annually since 1974/75
	Bendel State Library, Benin	Annually since 1974/75
(e) Library Assistants Course (or workshop)	ABU, Zaria, Kashim Ibrahim Lib. Plateau State Div. of NLA	Annually since 1977/78
(f) Library Attendants Course	ABU, Zaria, Kashim Ibrahim Lib.	Annually since 1974/75
(g) Library Procedure Course	Univ. of Port Harcourt Lib.	1977/78
(h) Library Techniques Course in Acquisition, Cataloguing, Circulation & Serials (for Library Assistants and Attendants)	Alvan Ikoku College of Education Lib.	Annually since 1974/75
	Univ. of Maiduguri Lib.	1977/78
	ATC, Katsina Ala Library	1977/78
	Bayero Univ. Library	1974/75
(i) Organisation Course for Library Assistants	Oyo State Library	Annually since 1975/76
(j) Orientation Course (i) - for Library Assistants	Petroleum Training Institute Lib. Warri	1976/77
(ii) -for Library Attendants	Institute Lib. Warri	1975/76
(k) Practical Training Course for Library Science Students	National Lib. of Nigeria, Lagos	Annually since 1975/76
(l) Teacher-Librarian Vocation Workshop	Bendel State Library, Benin	Annually since 1974/75

From this table of courses libraries which are not in a position to organise courses for their staff can contact the various organisers listed against the courses that are of interest to them so as to determine the suitability of their courses to the needs of the respective libraries.

One way of helping libraries determine whether proposed courses would meet their needs is to ensure that the title given to each course is appropriate for the course bearing in mind the course content. I consider it relevant here, therefore, to explain what would be expected from a few course titles.

Orientation Course: This course should be designed principally for new employees who need to know something about their new jobs and how they

differed from what they did before; problems, prospects and what is expected of them as library staff.

Induction Course: This course is similar to the orientation course being introductory in nature.

Practical Course: This course should lay emphasis on the performance of the job rather than the theory. It should be assumed that the participants already have substantial theoretical knowledge. The course should therefore aim at teaching the participants ways of translating their theoretical knowledge into practice. Speed and efficiency should be emphasised.

In-service Course: This course should be designed to teach new techniques, or how to use new equipment to already serving staff with a view to improving their efficiency.

Library Techniques Course: This course should teach the procedure for various technical services and it could be designed for new employees or organised as an in-service course.

Library Procedure Course: The contents of the course could be similar to those of the library techniques course.

Library Organisation/Management: This is a purely management course in which the science and art of managing the library should be taught. The details would depend on the status of persons attending.

Libraries were asked whether they had ever sent their staff for short courses organised outside their libraries within the past five years. As can be seen from the table below public and Special libraries sent more of their staff for short courses organised outside their own libraries than did College and University libraries.

	Yes	No
College & University Libraries	34.8%	65.2%
Public Libraries	71.4%	28.6%
Special Libraries	71.4%	28.6%
All Libraries	48.6%	51.4%

The Libraries which did not send their staff for courses were asked to indicate what their constraints were and they responded as follows:-

	Coll.& Univ.	Public	Special	All Lib.
Insufficiency of funds	26.3%	66.7%	0.0%	28.0%
No relevant Courses	10.5%	0.0%	50.0%	12.0%
Meagre staff strength	31.6%	0.0%	50.0%	32.0%
Did not think of it	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other constraints	21.6%	33.3%	0.0%	28.0%

The responses show that Special libraries have had some difficulty finding relevant courses to send their staff to. For Public libraries insufficiency of funds is the major constraint while for all libraries meagre staff strength posed the biggest problem. Among the other constraints listed by respondents are: lack of interest of their parent bodies and the non-provision for staff development by some others. This happens quite often in libraries attached to new organisations and it is expected that once the parent organisation works out a staff development programme, the library staff would benefit from it.

In order to find out the areas in which libraries had the greatest need for courses all respondents were asked to indicate in order of priority the areas in which they would be interested in sending their staff for courses. The table below shows how the services in which courses were desired fared as the first choice of the various types of libraries.

	Coll. & Univ.	Public	Special	All Lib.
Cataloguing Procedure Practice and Management	56.5%	0.0%	42.8%	45.7%
Collections Development	4.3%	20.0%	14.3%	8.6%
Circulation Management	8.8%	0.0%	14.3%	8.6%
Library and Information Systems				
Administration	8.8%	40.0%	14.3%	14.3%
Planning Budgeting & Fund Raising	4.3%	40.0%	0.0%	8.6%
Reference and Information				
Management Techniques	4.3%	0.0%	14.3%	5.6%
Library Buildings Development	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Selection & Interviewing of New Staff	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Supervision	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Non-Professional Technical Services	13.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.6%

Where cataloguing procedure, practice and management is of great concern to College, University and Special Libraries, Public libraries are more concerned about ways and means of raising funds to support their operations. It is interesting to observe that most libraries were opting for basically management and professional courses. Such courses would require a careful co-ordination between management experts and experienced and competent librarians. Unfortunately this desire does not quite agree with the response to the question on the category of staff they preferred to see courses organised for as shown below.

	Coll. & Univ.	Public	Special	All Lib.
Professional	8.7%	14.3%	0.0%	7.9%
Non-Professional	34.8%	0.0%	42.9%	31.0%
Both	56.5%	85.7%	57.1%	60.5%

Funding a proposal is as important as the proposal itself hence the respondents were asked to indicate how much their libraries might be willing to budget in a year in order to ensure that their staff would effectively benefit from a Year's programme. Their response is summarized below:-

	Coll. & Univ.	Public	Special	All Lib.
Less than N500	26.1%	0.0%	14.3%	18.9%
N500 - N1000	21.7%	0.0%	28.6%	18.9%
N1000 - N2000	17.4%	0.0%	42.8%	18.9%
N2000 - N3000	8.7%	28.6%	0.0%	10.8%
N3000 - N4000	8.7%	28.6%	0.0%	10.8%
N4000 - N5000	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
More than N5000	0.0%	28.6%	0.0%	5.4%
Could not respond	17.4%	14.2%	14.3%	16.3%

Although a Library's budget would depend partly on its staff strength, its interest in staff development would be reflected in its provision for the item in its budget. It appears that Public Libraries are willing to spend more than N2000 while Special Libraries might not be supported by their parent organisation beyond that amount. Some respondents who could not answer this particular question indicated that their commitment would depend on the policies of their parent organisation. In conclusion, it seems that non-professionals are being taken care of in the provision of short courses than the professionals. Management and technical refresher courses need to be mounted to help professionals improve their performance. Potential course organisers should broaden their courses, title them precisely and disseminate information about them widely so that many libraries would benefit. In view of the poor staffing position of many libraries, there is the need for libraries to budget more for staff development and

to ensure that their staff have the fullest benefit from their staff development programmes.

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