PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR LIBRARIANS IN RIVERS STATE IN A DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the professional development activities and different professional skills acquired by librarians, the different tools used, and the areas in which these tools are applied in rendering library services. A survey research design was used for the study. The population for the study comprised 99 librarians in Rivers State on the Association's WhatsApp platform. An online questionnaire was developed and used for the study using google forms. Descriptive statistics of frequency and simple percentages were used to analyse the data collected. The findings revealed that Zoom, Webinars, and YouTube were the most utilized digital tools, while Whova and Futurelearn were the least utilized. Digital skills mostly acquired included online search techniques among others, the least acquired skills were data mining, cyber security, and metadata. A major Challenge encountered include lack of funds. The paper, therefore, recommended that librarians should be given financial support to embark on training.

Keywords: Digital age, Professional tools, Information services, Professional development.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of technological advancement in the library workspace has transformed the roles of librarians from manual to technology-based information service delivery. New information resources, emerging services, alternative ways of organizing work, and more sophisticated expectation of users has necessitated the need for librarians to keep abreast of these changes by acquiring the necessary skills. This has necessitated a permanent need for librarians to keep up with these emerging trends by developing themselves professionally through rigorous training and retraining. Recently, online tools have been made available for librarians to exploit in updating their professional knowledge and acquiring skills to perform better on their jobs. These online tools amongst others include Twitter, wikis, e-learning, blogs, LinkedIn, and social bookmarking.

Digital professional tools provide librarians with various opportunities offered by web 2.0, a term that refers to an interactive web experience focused on the ability of people to collaborate and share information online via social media, blogging, and web-based communities to improve their professional skills. This is expected to go a long way in helping librarians search for, and update themselves with the latest technology and applications. The application of these improved skills in the workplace is also expected to go a long way in improving efficiency and job performance. Ugwuanyi and Ejikeme (2011) stated that Librarians need to keep track of developments in technology and new information products so as to access them for use in their libraries and to exploit them to improve their services. He further stated that they also need sufficient Information Technology knowledge to supervise projects in their library, and to draw up specifications for the projects. These can only be achieved by updating and acquiring skills through the available online professional tools.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives guided the study:
1. To investigate the different digital professional skills acquired by librarians in Rivers State.
2. To ascertain the different digital tools used by Librarians in Rivers State for professional development.
3. To determine the different areas in which librarians in Rivers State apply the skills acquired in offering information services.
4. To find out the challenges faced by the librarian in Rivers State in acquiring digital Professional skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is therefore being carried out to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the different digital professional skills acquired by librarians in Rivers State?
2. What are the different digital tools used by Librarians in Rivers State for professional development?
3. What are the different areas in which librarians in Rivers State apply the skills acquired in offering information services?
4. What are the challenges faced by the librarian in Rivers State in acquiring digital Professional

skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abba and Dawha (2009) opined that the library profession has become aware of the need for continuous training, because of the increasing variety of information formats and dependence on automated systems. The changing nature of library users and the demand for managers with appropriate skills have added to the need for training.

Jones (2003: p.11) noted that:

"A really excellent librarian will not only have the basic computer skills but will know how to update those skills as needs rapidly change during the course of a career. A really excellent librarian will not only know how to use technology but will have a vision of how technology is likely to change over the coming years and what influence those changes will have on current investments and decisions."

The online environment has provided various platforms for library and information professionals to explore when communicating. With the evolutionary trend of information and communication technologies (ICTs), library and information science professionals can now easily share ideas and information relating to their professional practices. (Udo-Anyanwu et al., 2020).

The Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) also mandates Librarians to seek to update their knowledge and skills through programmes to keep them abreast of the best global practices and applications in the profession. The council also stated that Librarians should embrace new ideas, new knowledge, and innovations that will contribute to the development of the profession through a continuous redefinition of the services they provide to society.

Yee (2012) opined that the challenges for libraries are to have a pool of skilled staff ready to take on emerging new roles and responsibilities in the digital environment. Successful digital librarianship is expected to be equipped with expertise in digital technologies, followed by new cutting-edge technologies for managing digital resources and services in libraries.

Professional learning networks that are developed through blogs, Twitter, wikis, webinars, and other Web 2.0 tools allow for current material to be shared very quickly. It is more important how the tools are used, rather than which ones are being used. Through this process, online professional learning networks and communities can improve the quality of professional development. There is value in exploring Web 2.0 use for professional learning (Burden, 2010). Career-long professional development is viewed as a requirement for the modern librarian because of the changing complexities of the global landscape. Burden (2010) states five key features of Web 2.0 technologies that are of major value to a librarian's job performance. These are user-generated publishing, collaboration, re-purposing, multi-literacy, and research. Digital tools such as e-learning platforms, webinars, blogs, and wikis allow for the acquisition of these skills.

According to Sreenivasulu (2000), A Digital Librarian (DL) is a type of specialist or information

professional who manages and or organizes the digital library, combines the functionality for information, elicitation, planning, data mining, knowledge mining, digital reference services, electronic information services, representation of information, extraction, and distribution of information, co-ordination, searching notably CD-ROMs, online, Internet-based www, multimedia access, and retrieval. The ultimate goal of a DL is to facilitate access to information just in time to the critical wants of end users and additionally to facilitate electronic publishing.

The last decade has seen a tremendous social, economic, educational, and institutional change in all areas including the library community. The author also states that the digital librarian plays a distinctive and dynamic role in the easy access of computer-held digital information including abstracts, indexes, full-text databases, and sound and video recordings in digital formats. For finding the right information at the right time.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications in social relevance, accountability, diversity, and globalization have to be addressed in order to survive the onslaught of information overload. In the 21st century libraries are unique to support all sectors in research, academics, and other core areas linked with development. The ICT revolution has helped a lot in servicing users but also brings with it several forces that question the role of libraries themselves. ICT plays a key role to manage and disseminate digital information and it is very attractive to authors, publishers, and libraries for this simple reason that gives the revolutionized way of knowledge, which is produced and disseminated to the end users, usually in a fast, timely, and efficient way.

A digital librarian requires to provide digital library services: e-journals, e-books, consortia-based services, archives, e-learning content, multimedia content, E-Current Awareness Services, ask a librarian, virtual reference services, institutional repositories, and a plethora of similar services in a pro-active manner. The ICT-trained librarians and information professionals are to be experts in information management, selecting, acquiring, organizing, preserving, repackaging, searching, sharing, and disseminating in the digital environment. Today, modern libraries and information centers generate the need for creating a new position "digital librarian" to manage their digital resources and services. These modern libraries and information centers are emerging as knowledge warehouses in the networking environment.

ROLES OF DIGITAL LIBRARIAN

To manage modern libraries and information centres in the digital environment, librarians are required to do the following:

1. Selecting and acquiring e-books, e-journals, databases, etc.
2. Creating digital collection.
3. Set up and development of digital libraries.
4. Organize digital knowledge and information resources.
5. Provide 24/7 digital reference service to users within the campus and off campus.

6. Digitization and preservation of cultural heritage.

7. Creative Commons license to support reuse of data.

8. Provide discovery and accessibility information resources at the global level.

9. Electronic publishing works.

10. Use of social media to engage in conversation with users.

11. Provide outreach program facilities.

12. Blogging/WordPress platform to current issues.

13. Deterring plagiarism through anti-plagiarism tools.

14. Conducting training/orientation programs to enhance the usage of digital library collection and services.

A study by Edet and Obi (2020) on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities of Librarians during COVID-19 revealed that the majority of Librarians involved in CPD used digital tools such as zoom, webinars, and WhatsApp. Findings from this study further revealed that different areas of librarianship were covered, including the creation and use of online surveys, library administration, library automation, presentation skills, online marketing of library services, information literacy skills, and other current topics in librarianship.

CHALLENGES

Barriers to the professional development of academic librarians have been noted by a number of librarians. Auster and Chan in their study (as cited in Attebury, 2016) describe a lack of awareness, resources, time, convenience, motivation, and quality as common. Location and workplace culture and climate act as barriers as well. The authors also mention that personal barriers such as health and family constraints prevent some librarians from partaking in professional Development opportunities. Kendrick, Tritt, and Leaver (2012) also cite these barriers and add to the list those related to technological availability and understanding, especially those in small and rural academic libraries. Jizba (1997) cites administrative lack of support as yet another problem facing librarians in need of professional education.

RESEARCH METHODS

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study using all the professional librarians in Rivers state that belong to the WhatsApp platform. An online questionnaire was developed using google forms for data collection. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentages.

FINDINGS

Research Question one: What are the different digital professional skills acquired by librarians in Rivers State?

DIGITAL SKILLS ACQUIRED

S/N	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Digital Marketing	10	32.3%
2	Big Data	6	19.4%
3	Social media marketing	14	45.2%
4	Digital learning …	18	58.1%
5	Metadata	4	12.9%
6	Data mining	0	0%
7	Online search	26	83.9%
8	Information cur…	7	22.6%
9	Cybersecurity	2	6.5%

Table 1

Findings from the study according to table 1 reveal that the majority of the respondents acquired skills in online search techniques, digital learning, digital marketing, and social media marketing, while only a few acquired skills in metadata, big data, and cyber security.

Research Question two: What are the different digital tools used by Librarians in Rivers State for professional development?

Digital Tools Used

S/N	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Coursera	4	12.9%
2	YouTube	18	58.1%
3	Digital skills for Africa	3	9.7%
4	MOOC	9	29%
5	Whova	2	6.5%
6	Zoom	28	90.3%
7	Webinars	23	74.2%
8	Futurelearn	1	3.2%

Table 2

Research Question Three: What are the different areas in which librarians in Rivers State apply the skills acquired in offering information services?

Areas in which Digital skills are acquired

S/N	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Cataloguing and classification	14	45.2%
2	Indexing and abstracting	6	19.4%
3	Current awareness	17	54.8%
4	Online research	25	80.6%
5	Circulation of library resources	12	38.7%

6	Selective dissemination of information	17	54.8%
7	Reference services	11	35.5%

Table 3

Research Question Four

What are the challenges faced by librarian in Rivers State in acquiring digital Professional skills?

Challenges Faced in obtaining Digital Professional Development

S/N	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Lack of interest	11	35.5%
2	Lack of support	18	58.1%
3	Lack of information on digital tools available	16	51.6%
4	Lack of funds	29	93.5%
5	Poor collaboration	1	3.2%
6	Inadequate training provided	1	3.2%

Table 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Digital Skills acquired by Librarians

Results from research question one show that majority of the respondents acquired skills in online search techniques, digital learning, digital marketing and social media marketing, while only a few acquired skills in metadata, big data and cyber security. This is in line with the study conducted by Cossham and Fields (2006) in which topics associated with electronic resources and information technology scored highly. Reference skills and information literacy, research, communication skills and user education were also topics covered. However, information literacy was selected as either very important or important by high numbers of respondents in all library sectors, which was unexpected.

Digital Tools used by Librarians

Results from research question two show that majority of librarians use Youtube, zoom and webinars as tools for professional development, while only a few use Digital skills for Africa and Whova. This is in line with the study carried out by Edet and Obi (2021) which revealed that majority of Librarians involved in CPD used digital tools such as zoom, webinars and whatsapp.

Areas in which digital skills are applied

Results from research question three reveal that skills acquired were majorly applied in the areas of online research, current awareness and selective dissemination of information, while only a few were applied in indexing and abstracting and circulation. This is in line with the study Edet and Obi (2021) that majority of librarians applied their skills in various information services in the library.

Challenges faced in acquiring Digital Information

Results from research question four reveal that lack of funds and lack of support constitute majority of the challenges faced, while lack of collaboration and inadequate training was not considered major challenges. This is in line with the findings by Kendrick, Tritt, and Leaver (2012) also cite these

barriers and adds to the list those related to technological availability and understanding, especially those in small and rural academic libraries. Jizba (1997) cites administrative lack of support as yet another problem facing librarians in need of professional education.

CONCLUSION:

Digital Librarianship is an essential requirement in libraries to the managing of digital information resources and services. The ICT have enabled libraries to automate housekeeping operations and make cost effectively to efficient delivery of information services to user different digital platforms. Professional development is key to acquiring latest skills in the profession and acquiring these skills this have been possible by the different digital tools being made available to training and retraining.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

i.   Librarians should keep themselves abreast of available digital tools to develop themselves professionally.

ii.   Librarians should maximise the use of these digital tools.

iii.   Librarians should learn to apply skills learnt in their various workplaces.

iv.   Support should be given to librarians from institutions to acquire these digital skills.

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