

TRENDS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is the key to any individual or group progress, as it plays an important role in the national development of very nation. Continuing education is therefore necessary for professional growth. However, it is observed in most professions in the country, continuing education is not taken very seriously. This is because the programme is not well organised and managed, with little if any of government assistance. This paper attempted to highlight the rationale for continuing education, and what is being practiced in the country. It emphasised that for information professionals in the country to successfully catch up with the challenges of the 21st century, there is the need to improve on the programme and allow the sole organization and management of continuing education to professional bodies.

Suggestions that would assist in providing the required continuing education programmes for information professionals were also provided.

Introduction

Man is naturally optimistic in his thinking, hence, he needs motivation for the development of his ideas. This makes him to always envy his fellow colleagues in anything progressive. He tries to improve in everything he does either for himself or for his immediate community. Consequently, one way in which man develops is by acquiring knowledge and skills through education.

Definition and objectives of education

Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1996), defines education as a process of training and instruction, which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. Thus, education is assumed to be concerned with instituting values, attitudes, and motivation. It is vital to the development of an individual particularly as it relates to his profession. According to Oyedum (1988), the aims and objectives of higher education can be stated as following:

- (i) The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society;
- (ii) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments;
- (iii) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community;
- (iv) The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

In other words, education has always developed along with professional growth, that is to say, the existence of any profession develops along with its professional education. Auyo (1994) maintained that education is a key determinant to the realization of the development of a systematic, vigorous theory which supports and delineates the skill required for the practice of the profession as well as the attainment of the authority at the level required of a profession.

This assertion is true particularly to the information professionals, who due to constant changes which occur leave the professionals with no alternative but to adapt their services in response to economic, political, educational and social development.

Librarians have all along been committed to accumulating and retrieving the wisdom handed down through the centuries and to offering that wisdom in many formats to the people in order that the people might come to know and understand the world.

Continuing education

According to Marghalani (1993) continuing education consists of all learning activities and efforts, formal and informal, by which individuals seek to upgrade their knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and understanding in their role in order to deliver quality performance in the work setting, and enrich their career. Thus, learning opportunities through continuing education can improve the competence of personnel and quality of service. It offers possibility for increasing knowledge, improving skills and changing attitudes of professionals. It can also help information professionals cope with more traditional concerns such as management, library buildings, supervision, budgeting, etc. There is therefore, the need for librarians in particular and information professionals in general to have a continuing education system to be able to cope with the informational needs of their users.

Rationale For Continuing Education

Society generally, have moved from industrial one to an information society. An information society according to Nzotta (1994), is a society in which people will take the predominant role of information in government, business and everyday life for granted. Any information required by someone will be properly packaged and delivered fast to the person. The importance of information for the advancement of individuals, groups, organisations, nations and human society generally cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, libraries, archives information and documentation centres which have crucial roles to play in the collection, organisation and dissemination of information are also indispensable to society.

New technologies for information storage and retrieval are overwhelming. Technological revolution has affected information professionals. The information institutions earlier on mentioned cannot function efficiently and effectively, without appropriate skilled personnel who are dedicated to their job. They must be equipped to respond to service management changes, reduced funding levels, information of new technologies, anticipating and satisfying the expectations of the users, and exploring new possibilities for improved service deliveries. Thus, all categories of information professionals particularly librarians in all types of libraries have need to learn often for a number of reasons. The standards of personnel performance and institutional accountability are increasingly demanding, and without consistent and deliberate efforts, obsolescence is inevitable.

The above needs have prompted increased interest in staff development and continuing education among the information professionals. They need to update their knowledge, acquire new skills, and maintain basic competencies to achieve a technological upgrading of libraries and information centres. Knowledge of emerging trends and future situation is valuable to the information professionals; hence, expected future trends in the profession would therefore be relevant.

In view of the foregoing, the education and staff development programmes i.e continuing education that are considered most effective in preparing information professionals for the tasks ahead include:-

- Programmes to teach information technologies, information retrieval skills, design of retrieval system, preservation or information with much emphasis on the practical aspects;
- Programmes that lead to furthering the role of the librarian in the educational process to enable him to guide users to information i.e. user education;
- Personnel management skills.

Continuing Education In Nigeria

The trend in continuing education for information professionals in this country, despite many problems can be said to be the same model for other professions. It is important to note that funds, personnel, equipment, materials and other resources for library and information services are not adequate. There is an agreed policy by the government that budgetary provision for library services be 10% of the total regular recurrent budget in tertiary institutions in the country. However, this has not been the case, even where it is possible, not all is released to the library. In Nigeria, library and information services are usually very low in the order of priority of policy makers. Consequently, they tend to be neglected and under funded. Ochogwu (1994) (a Nigerian library Educator) observed that without enough resources and physical facilities such as Library science

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laboratories, and demonstration rooms, instructions and research by implication Education) in library and information service will be in jeopardy.

Continuing education programmes in periods of economic recession become much more important for individual career advancement and for the progress of professions and organisations than in normal times. Its value is not in dispute but there should be good planning in terms of organization and management, this has not always been easy.

Continuing education for information professionals in Nigeria has been the responsibility of the individuals, the library and the library schools and the professional association. The programmes should be for non-professionals, para-professionals and professionals.

It requires careful study to be able to determine the training needs of workers of different categories and define themes and objectives of short courses, workshops, seminars and conferences that would appeal to the target audience. Considerations should also be given to timing, duration, location, resource persons, activities and fees which are critical in determining level of participation and success.

A major issue to be determined is who should have the main responsibility for organizing continuing education programmes for the profession? Various institutions and organizations acting individually have been hampered by lack of defined responsibilities and coordinated efforts; inadequate expertise, management skills, funds and other resources. Consequently, continuing education programmes for information professionals have been haphazardly organized and have not been very successful. This is because administrative leadership does not consistently extend access to existing opportunities to all personnel, nor does it reward or recognize their participation.

This act is deliberate so as to kill the profession, most especially if it is regarded as a threat to the administration. They hide under the cover of lack of funds or the person involved is not presenting a paper, therefore, such person's attendance is not mandatory. How' then would professionals benefit from these programmes?.

Suggestions

- (a) One should suggest that necessary backing should be given to the library and information science schools and the professional body to have the sole responsibility to organize continuing education programmes for the profession. The schools have the teaching resources and expertise while the body is in a position to mobilize its members to participate in continuing education programmes. However, individuals and employing libraries i.e practitioners should not be neglected but should also share responsibilities.
- (b) Interested agencies and government should have interest and should actively participate in this area since continuing education vital to the profession all hands must be on deck to see that it is well managed and should cover all professional staff. The active involvement of professional associations and practitioners in the organization of the programmes will ensure harmony between theory and practice, and the granting of professional endorsement to education.
- (c) These requirements can only be achieved through the availability of an enabling situation which responds to the needs and interests of employers, employees, professional bodies and the providers of learning opportunities. Employers need competent staff, employees need job satisfaction and career growth, professional bodies seek to maintain the status of their work force and ensure high standards of service, and educators maintain that where professional education ends training competencies begin.
- (d) Curriculum of the schools should be updated from time to time to incorporate the new ideas worldwide, as this would enable information professionals stand shoulder to shoulder with their counterparts worldwide.
- (e) Present efforts in continuing education for information professionals in the country are not adequate. There should be improvement and constant manpower planning; knowledge of information technologies aspects should be expanded. Individuals, employing libraries, library agencies, library schools and library association should be given more responsibility as following:

- (i) Individuals should have the basic responsibility for self-direction and self-development. That is, each person must identify his or her own needs for learning, establish personal goals, then supply the internal energy and drive as well as contribute some of the time and fund necessary to obtain learning. However, there is a limit to how much the staff are going to reach into their own pockets to pay for it. Hence, the employing library should accept learning as an integral and vital function of the organization, actively interacting with the goals, planning, and operation of the library. The library administration know personnel and organizational needs and the relation between them, and should be willing to commit staff time and library budget for learning, and provide incentives for staff members who actively participate in learning.
- (ii) The library agency or board in the State should be responsible for coordinating learning efforts on a state wide basis and getting adequate support for them. It should identify priority needs for continuing education within the state and conduct those activities not done more appropriately by others.
- (iii) Library/information science schools should serve as an area where experimentation, evaluation, and research can occur. It offers courses designed for practitioners as well as for those entering the field. They are in a unique position to alert practitioners to their need and responsibility for continued learning and to help them build the skills and attitudes they will need for their continued self development.
- (iv) Library association i.e. NLA should be responsible nationally for identifying the larger learning needs within the library field. They should establish standards and guidelines for learning opportunities, produce journals and publications, and identify resources to help practitioners learn.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for Nigerian information professionals to meet up with the challenges of the 21st century, there is an urgent need to improve on the present efforts of continuing education. Its importance to the profession who due to information explosion and the complex needs of users for it is overwhelming, cannot be overemphasized. There is the need to have coherent policies about continuing education programme in information education in the country.

There should be understanding between information professionals, particularly the librarians and library educators to achieve a common goal. Also a special grant can be set up by the library and library schools for the purpose of helping its staff to update their knowledge through continuing education. The participation of government and interested bodies e.g. information sectors in sponsoring the organization of workshops and conferences for information professionals is necessary. Library and information science schools should participate actively in setting up, designing and reversing mechanizing for the continuing education programmes.

The trend in continuing education for information professionals in Nigeria is necessary due to the broader vision and application of new ideas. This makes the professional try to keep up with the knowledge related to his mastery of the new conceptions of his own profession; the professional needs to continue his study of the basic disciplines which support his profession; and the professional needs to grow as a person as well as a professional. He achieves all these through continuing education.

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