

# Continuing Education and Human Capacity Building in Library and Information Science Education: Issues and Challenges in a Technological Era

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the challenges facing human capacity in library and information science (LIS) education in a technological era with a view of recommending a strategic action plan for coping with challenges.

**Design/methodology/Approach:** A three prong approach was adapted to explore the challenges confronting human capacity building in LIS education. The first approach was a review of related literature. The second approach was to identify the avenue for human capacity building in LIS education. The third approach was to articulate and discuss the challenges facing human capacity building in LIS education. Based on these challenges, the way forward was recommended.

**Findings:** the challenges facing human capacity building in LIS education were identified as problem of succession, inadequate curriculum, professionalism and predominantly out-dated information resources. The way forward for addressing these challenges consisted of provision of state of an equipment coordinated conferences, seminars and workshops, review of LIS curriculum as well as keeping up to date in one's area of specialization.

**Practical Implication:** New and improved methods as well as advances in technology are preconditions for human capacity building both in education and LIS education. Library and Information Sciences professional have found themselves in an era of technology that challenges LIS education especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. It is therefore imperative that these challenges are identified with a view to advancing recommendation for addressing them.

**Originality/Value:** The originality of this paper lies in the challenges that have been identified as confronting human capacity building in LIS education in an era of technology. The paper becomes more valuable from the attempts made to recommend measures for addressing these challenges.

**Key Words:** Continuing education, Education, Human Capacity Building, Library and Information Science Education, Technological Development.

**Paper Type:** Conceptual

## **Introduction**

“**A** Librarian's training is out of date on the day of his graduation”, (Boadi, 1994). Encapsulated within this aphorism is the very essence of continuing education. The unprecedented and unpredictable rate of technological development within and outside the library and information profession continues to make it difficult if not impossible for a librarian whether a practitioner or an educator to rely on his basic training for any appreciable duration of his professional career. Such factors as the impact of new technology,

the ever-increasing amount of new knowledge, new kinds of library patrons, new kinds of information resources, etc have made it absolutely imperative for librarians to be engaged actively in continuing education programmes. This is the only way they can remain professionally up-to-date and more importantly provide information resources and services that meet the challenges imposed on them by these new developments.



## **Defining the key Concepts**

Continuing education has been given various interpretations depending on the context in which it is used. While some have used the term to exclude formal certificate or degree-awarding education, others have broadened the perspective to include all education after the pre-service or basic qualification. Such education may be formal or informal, structured or unstructured. For purposes of this paper, continuing education is used to represent that form of education which affords librarians the possibility of mobility from one cadre to the next through full-time or part-time courses. In addition, it is used to cover attendance at conferences, workshops, seminars and short courses which may have a variety of objectives.

According to Wikipedia (2000) human capacity building refers to the long term process of facilitating knowledge acquisition to individuals about a particular sector, so that they can get empowered and acquire appropriate skills to successfully perform their required functions towards improving the quality of their lives and services". It is evident from the above that continuing education and human capacity building in library and information science are inseparable since the later cannot be achieved without the former.

## **Brief review of Literature**

In order to facilitate human capacity building, the University of Dundee (2005) prescribes that university senates be wholly committed to continuing education of staff and recognize the need to allocate resources for that purpose. It also suggested that appropriate administrative structures be put in place to encourage academic service and administrative units to identify and meet staff development needs, since staff benefit by enhancing their competence and increasing their job satisfaction.

Human capacity building according to University of Leeds (2006) embraces a wide range of learning experiences both within and outside the university, and is a continuing process that can help individuals to:

- a. Identify and develop their potential
- b. Respond positively to change, uncertainty and conflict
- c. Improve their self confidence, and

- d. Extend their range of performance.

Human capacity building in the view of experts, seeks to create professional staff who are skilled and effective in their performance and as a consequence feel content with both their job and organization. (Aminu, 1992; Banjeko, 1996; Iheriohanma, 2002). From the foregoing, it is evident that human capacity building programmes give rise to professionals who are not only up-to-date but effective or efficient on their jobs.

Underscoring the positive relationship between continuing education and human capacity building Taiwo (1990) remarked that "competent employees do not remain competent forever; skills deteriorate and can become obsolete". This explains why organizations spend millions of naira every year on formal and information training.

Banjeko (1996) explains that the usual approach to human capacity building involves on-job or off-job. On-job includes learning through the experience of doing one's job, reflecting on that experience, discussing with a manager, mentor, coach, colleagues, receiving feedback on one's performance, reviewing and evaluating one's performance, being coached and supervised. Off-job involves participation in courses or conferences, undertaking a qualification through open or distance learning, secondment, placement, exchange visit, study leave etc.

Human capacity needs of individuals vary as those of organizations. It is evident that library and information science educators would have no need for training in literacy and numeracy. However, for them to 'feel good' about their job, it becomes very imperative for their capacity building to proceed along the lines of information communication technology, interpersonal and problem-solving skills acquisition.

Jobs change as a result of new technologies and improved methods. Similarly, computers and the use of the internet for various educational academic purposes by lecturers now impose on institutions of higher learning especially universities, the demand for human capacity building on technical skills. Lecturers need to upgrade their knowledge in their special areas as well as other areas. This view is shared by Wells (1998) who noted that 'as organizations flatten their structures expand their use of teams and

break down traditional barriers, employee need to learn a wider variety of tasks.

### **Avenues for Human Capacity Building in Library and Information Science**

Avenues for human capacity building in a technological era such as ours include short and advanced courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, membership of professional associations, staff exchange and visiting programmes etc. There are numerous benefits derivable from attendance to conferences, seminars and workshops. An individual who regularly participates in these activities is refreshed academically and professionally. Such an individual is acquainted with contemporary developments in his area of specialization. In workshops new skills are acquired and old ones are sharpened leading to better job performance.

The organization of these conferences, seminars, workshops etc should be the joint responsibility of both educators and practitioners of the library and information profession. Thus, the library schools, the National Library of Nigeria, the Nigerian Library Association should collaborate with all the implications that recent trends and developments have, no effort should be spared in 'educating' members of the profession and keeping them up-to-date. It is true that different groups enumerated above have periodically organized conferences, workshops etc. However, to be effective and to achieve desirable goals the conferences, workshop etc need to be co-ordinated and must be directed towards the specific needs of the profession. Conferences, workshops etc that are not need-oriented would of course, yield little beneficial results. These conferences may have been useful in imparting new knowledge and experience in the participants but they are infrequent. They would be more beneficial if are more frequent and are organized as part of a carefully articulated and coordinated national and state continuing education programme and not as **ad hoc** activities to provide avenues for publication of papers.

Membership of professional associations such as the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE), provides opportunities for the exchange of ideas, update and enrichment of knowledge, enforcement of professional ethics and discipline. As Nkebem (2006) observes, members of professional associations enjoy the illumination of their

minds in the practice of their profession. Through networking, ideas are exchanged by members either on-line or by actual conference, seminar or workshop participation. The ideas cover broad areas of professional practices which go a long way to increase the knowledge base and competence of educators and practitioners.

Staff exchange and visiting programmes also afford good opportunities for the acquisition of new knowledge, new skills and new experiences. They should therefore be part of any human capacity building programme. These visits provide increase interaction among members of the profession and help to generate trust, good will and understanding. Unfortunately, this aspect of human capacity building is not very popular on account of so-called 'administrative and financial implications'. Staff exchange programmes may also be arranged for teachers of library and information science who, like the other members of the profession, need to share experience with colleagues in other library schools.

As those responsible for the provision of the basic professional or pre-service education, the library schools owe it as a responsibility to the profession to be equally concerned about the human capacity building in this area. Since they cannot teach their students all they need to know, it is essential that the schools pursue non-formal continuing education programme with as much vigour as they pursue the formal ones so as to up-date the training and improve the competencies of practicing librarians. The conferences, workshops etc organized by the library schools must therefore also be geared towards the verified needs of the practitioners. In these activities there ought to be close collaboration between the library schools and all facets of the profession in order to achieve this objective.

Interactions among library schools should be encouraged since they enhance the exchange of ideas and experiences and the finding of solutions to common problems. Such interaction is in fact a form of human capacity building for the lecturers who must be given every opportunity to update their knowledge. It should go without saying that a teacher, whose responsibility is to impart knowledge to others and keep them up-to-date must himself, be up-to-date.

## **The Challenges Facing the Library and Information Science Teacher:**

### **Problem of succession**

The critical challenge confronting library and information science teachers is how professionally sound librarians can be produced to succeed the older and ageing ones who are likely to retire in the next few years (Ifidon and Ifion 2007). Many brilliant young librarians are finding their way to the private sector; others are migrating to other parts of the world in search of greener pastures while others still who are privileged to undertake postgraduate studies abroad no longer return to complement the efforts of those who graduated in Nigeria. One of the consequences of this challenge is that retired professors take up adjunct and contract appointments for several years.

### **Inadequate curriculum**

There is increasing concern about the appropriateness of the curriculum of library and information science in Nigeria. This concern was aptly captured by Aina (2007:3) when he posited as follows:

*A curriculum must be in tandem with the requirements of both the current and potential employers... the curriculum must be relevant to the immediate environment. It must in addition, reflect the best international practices. In designing an appropriate and quality curriculum, the interests of employers of library and information science graduates become apparent.*

Unfortunately, the curricula of library schools in Nigeria have not responded positively to the changes and demands in the labour market. This is a challenge to curriculum planners and library educators. There is need to make ICT related courses a dominant component of library and information science programmes.

### **Professionalism**

A lot of people ask the questions "Is library science a profession? These include students of library and information science. It would appear that many people are not sure of what librarianship is all about, at least in Nigeria. Many people are not sure librarianship is a profession. This might have been the situation when Dewey (1876) wrote as follows:

*The time has come when a librarian may, without assumption, speak of his*

*occupation as a profession. The best librarians are no longer men of merely negative virtues. They are positive, aggressive characters, standing in the front rank of the education of their communities, side by side with the preachers and the teachers. He must put every facility in the way of readers, so that they shall be led on from good to better. The time has come when a library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense, a teacher. Will any man deny to the calling of such a librarianship the title of a profession?*

Melvil Dewey was a true pioneer librarian who strongly believed in the profession. In Nigeria today, there a good number of library professionals who have earned full professional respect and honours for themselves. The challenge now is how to motivate more and more librarians to do their work professionally, using their specialized knowledge to affect communities so that they can realize that no meaningful development can be achieved if the roles played by librarians are not adequately played or are not played at all.

### **Predominantly out-dated information resources**

Bibliographic and electronic information sources are the raw materials that enable teachers teach well and librarians to offer high quality library and information services. However many teachers in Nigeria do not have access to state-of-the-art materials and equipment including books. Such teachers even when very qualified cannot make the desired impacts. The situation is further compound by the libraries inability to receive enough funds for books and other equipment.

## **The Way Forward**

The following recommendations have become necessary in view of the above challenges.

1. There is a need to review the curriculum of library and information science with a view to making ICT related courses a dominant component.
2. Library and information science educators must develop themselves by keeping abreast of advances in world scholarship in their areas of specialization. If this is not done, they risk recycling old ideas from old university notes and imparting such ideas to the students of library and

information science who are under their tutelage.

3. Library and information science educators must be ICT compliant if they must teach ICT related courses efficiently. Greater efforts at human capacity building must be made in this area by the universities in collaboration with the National Universities Commission.
4. State-of-the-art facilities and equipment for teaching ICT-related courses are very expensive. Government must muster the political will to make them widely available. The ETF interventionist approach is appreciated but is not making much impact.
5. Since the library schools cannot be reasonably expected to teach students all they need to know, since information communication technology is so dynamic, it is essential that they pursue non-formal continuing education programmes with much vigour in order to up-date the competencies of practicing librarians.
6. Conferences, seminars and workshops in library and information science need to be coordinated. The individual associations must come together and articulate conference and workshop themes that will address the contemporary challenges of the profession. Only national conferences can be expected to make national impact not local ones.
7. Regular interactions among library schools should be encouraged since they promote exchange of ideas and experience, promote standardization and mutual understanding.

### Conclusion

The challenges of human capital development in a technological era are multi-faceted. For the teacher, the major challenges are how to keep himself up-to-date with rapid changes in his subject areas and related ICT, how to graduate individuals fully equipped to function effectively in a technology-driven economy and how to keep those already working up-dated with continuous changes occasioned by ICT. The

solution seems to lie in continuing education or life-long learning.

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