



Strengthening professional expertise: Mentoring in knowledge transfer, the cataloguers' perspective

M.A. Bello ^{a,*}, Y. Mansor ^b

^a University Library, ATBU, P.M.B. 0248 Bauchi, Nigeria

^b Department of Library and Information Science, KICT, IIUM, Gombak, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Abstract University libraries provide support for institutions to achieve their objectives. To realise these objectives, universities allocate considerable funds for the library's development and provision of needed resources that support teaching/research activities. This is for the simple reason that a university's excellence is synonymous with the effectiveness of its library services. Hence, there is a need for continuous training and retraining for retention of librarians who manage the libraries to achieve the university's objectives. Of the few on-the-job training models, mentoring as a Continuing Professional Development programme for librarians in a university library has often been overlooked. This study surveys the uses of mentoring in knowledge transfer for cataloguing, managerial, and research skills development for cataloguers in Nigerian academic libraries. The findings show that mentoring as a tool for knowledge transfer influences cataloguers and their skills development. The result indicates that mentoring in knowledge transfer has a moderate to strong correlation with skills development, and it improves cataloguers' proficiency and overall development.

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Introduction

From ancient times, cataloguers and their skills have been the cornerstone of librarianship. They facilitate library service with provision of organisation and orderly means of retrieving materials from the collection. Surveys of cataloguers' job descriptions continue to reveal that knowledge of cataloguing and classifications such as original/copy cataloguing, authority control, descriptive/subject cataloguing and use of standard tools (AACR, LSCH, LCCS, MARC)

are the most frequently required (Park & Caimei, 2009). Thus, cataloguers essentially provide a coordinated approach to the contents of all kinds of resources available in the library. In modern times, with the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to library operations and services, cataloguers' skills have been recognised in the creation of thesauri and in database management.

However, the skills, roles, and duties of cataloguers in the paradigm shift of Information Technology (IT) have

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: belloma63@yahoo.com (M.A. Bello), yushiana@kict.iium.edu.my (Y. Mansor).

been a subject of continuous debate. There appear to be differences in opinion among LIS educators, practitioners and employers on the best approaches to meeting challenges in the cataloguing profession. Cataloguers appear to be in a dilemma in their quest to acquire the best of all skills in an attempt to cope with the waves of change. In developing countries such as Nigeria, universities barely manage with inadequate funds, while library funding is not much better. Nigerian universities persistently complain of underfunding, and the meager Library Development Fund (LDF) hardly covers the inflation of monographs amidst other competing needs (journal and database subscription, Integrated Library Systems (ILS) and digital services maintenance, etc). Staff development, including development for cataloguers has to compete equally for attention from the available funds that are already insufficient to meet existing demands. Nonetheless, cataloguers have managed with their limited expertise, doing their utmost to blend their skill requirements with new ICT skills. Thus, they have kept up services for the university community. However, cataloguers' continuous development has become of paramount importance. This calls for a concerted effort to conduct research into how library institutions of developing countries could ensure the development of skills and knowledge in cataloguers.

The study

The automation of library services with digitisation of resources has influenced the methods used in cataloguing and the quantity of original cataloguing done in academic libraries. The changes brought about in bibliographic utilities in libraries have challenged the roles in this profession. Many have also questioned the future of cataloguers, especially with the increasing access to resources on the web. The required knowledge, skills and expertise to provide efficient organisation of libraries have also been matters of interest. The rate at which cataloguers have aged and retired without commensurating skillfully trained replacements raised great concerns. In addition, there are no decreases in the output of printed media; rather they are also accompanied with changes. The changes in forms, trends and objects of scholarship need to be accompanied with commensurate abilities and skills that promote standards, maintain authority control, and pursue efficient access to resources.

Meanwhile, increase in demand for cataloguers' technical skill not just in the library setting but also from vendors and other communities that need professional library skills has been predicted (Whitmell, 2006). The proficiency in cataloguing skill ensures not only quality of catalogue accuracy but also consistencies in the system. Besides, being skillful enables cataloguers to get work done and promote the best talents (Osborn, 2003). Furthermore, in the new information age, cataloguing skills are being used for the management of metadata, the design and application of search engines, and creation of organisational thesauri (Koina, 2003).

In a developing country like Nigeria, many of the numerous university libraries are yet to actualise functional and sustained automated ILS. Nonetheless, the demands for

library services to teeming academic communities continue to increase. Literature abounds on the study of cataloguers, their skills and development in libraries. However, little research exists on cataloguers' opinions on the use of mentoring as a tool for knowledge transfer for professional development, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Therefore, this study is designed to explore the role of mentoring to augment the existing system of practice. It is survey research that collects data from practicing cataloguers on the use of mentoring to transfer knowledge and skills in the cataloguing industry. It specifically examines perceptions of cataloguers on the use of mentoring in knowledge transfer for cataloguing, managerial, and research skills development. The study is directed at answering the following:

1. What is the perception of cataloguers on mentoring for development?
2. What is the perception of cataloguers on mentoring as a tool for skill and knowledge transfer for:
 - a) cataloguing skills development? (*Cataloguing skills*)
 - b) managerial skills development? (*Managerial skills*)
 - c) research and publication skills development? (*Research skills*)

Methodology

The study was designed to explore and describe the perceptions of cataloguers about mentoring as a tool for knowledge transfer in skills development in Nigerian public university libraries. To collect data for the study, an anonymous structured survey instrument was designed. The interval level of measurement using a Likert response scale was adopted to generate answers for the questions.

The instrument was tested on a small sample of cataloguers in five different university libraries. Based on the feedback received, appropriate changes were made. The principal component analysis was tested and the Cronbach's alpha was 0.7. Between April and September 2011, the survey was conducted with 279 practicing cataloguers from 48 public university libraries. The questionnaires were personally administered and retrieved. A total of 258 of the questionnaires were returned. However, only 228 (82%) were found usable for reporting in the study. The balance of 30 returned surveys could not be used, as many of the questions were left unanswered while others had multiple ticks in some of the questions. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 was used for the statistical analyses and the Pearson product-moment correlation test was used to explore the relationships between the variables.

Literature review

Inadequacy of trained professionals in areas of information retrieval (cataloguing) dates back to the Dewey period (Bothmann, 2007; Cunningham, 2008). This may be attributed to the nature, structure, and organisation of knowledge and perhaps the cataloguers' attempt to capture all possible links to subject matter. In modern times, information organisation and processing are better achieved

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