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Cataloger mentoring a survey of catalogers' perception on mentoring for skills development in academic libraries in Nigeria: An exploratory study

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Abstract Library services in the digital age have become user self-explorations while the geometrical growth in information resources continues to task bibliographic control, especially catalogers whose task is not only to provide efficient, and effective bibliographic control, but in addition timely access to all resources. However, the Catalogers' skills, knowledge and strength continued to dwindle in past decades; this has generated concern to the profession worldwide. Decline in education, unsatisfactory learning/training infrastructure and lowly attitude to cataloging courses by educators and students alike in Nigeria further eroded skill development and proficiency. Consequently, the catalogers are short of skills needed to perform their duties. This in turn may affect library services provisions. This study therefore, seeks to discern what catalogers across university libraries in Nigeria perceived of mentoring for skill development and critical role of mentoring for proficient cataloging skill. The study investigates 1) The state of mentoring in academic libraries of Nigerian Universities, 2) The perception of catalogers on mentoring for cataloging skill development. The research question is specifically directed at 1) What is the state of mentoring in academic libraries of Nigerian universities? a) Do Nigerian university libraries have mentoring programs for catalogers? b) What types of mentoring programs are available and how adequate and effective are the programs? 2) What is the perception of catalogers on mentoring? 3) What is the perception of catalogers on mentoring for cataloging skill development? The study adopted the descriptive survey method. With the use of a questionnaire, fifty catalogers were sampled from five Nigerian public university libraries in five of the six geopolitical zones of the country. The survey conducted in November/December, 2009 used a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire for data collection. From the total sample size, only 35 responses representing 70 percent were found useable for analysis. Findings revealed that the cataloger uses three types of mentoring programs Supervisory (81%), Situational (19%) and Group (13%) mentoring. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the respondents felt mentoring enhances their descriptive cataloging skills and their confidence in using work tools. While another 97% felt mentoring could be used for succession plans and as a stability factor in terms of changes. The catalogers perceived mentoring as

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a vital tool for skill development, considered it to have organizational benefits and agreed mentoring can be used to address the challenges of skill deficiency for improvement in the profession.

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Introduction

Education provides organised transmission of collective knowledge from one generation to another. New generations are equipped to face challenges of the future with the knowledge gathered from the past, as well as equip nations with the capacity to improve productivity, which enhances living standards. Tertiary institutions serve as the acme of formal development, and the university with their facilities and resources possess high capacity for human development. University libraries by virtue of their resources and services are the hive of scholarly activities. The resources, services, and efficiency are fundamental to course accreditation and almost synonymous with university excellence.

In the new millennium, library services have changed from mere repositories of knowledge, to global gateways, to access organised resources. Consequently, continuous training and retraining of librarians to manage the resources is imperative. Among factors affecting the health of library is the numerical strength and quality of the staff. The library staff creates the caliber of services that determines the prospect of the library; whether, the library will be dynamic, or static, or an information powerhouse (Allyson et al., 2006). Technological advancements and challenges of digitalization, e-resources, review of AACR/introduction of RDA, FRBR and diverse geometrical growth in information resources all pose challenges to librarianship. Especially to catalogers, whose task is to not only provide efficient and timely access, but to also harmonize bibliographic control of all library databases. However, the catalogers' skills, knowledge and numerical strength continued to dwindle in the past decades, and this has generated concern for the profession worldwide. This complicated decline in educational training further eroded skill development and consequently decreased cataloger proficiency in information management (Gorman, 2002; Intner, 2002 and Saye, 2002). In Nigeria the problem is aggravated by unsatisfactory learning conditions and training infrastructures as well as apathetic attitudes towards cataloging courses, both by educators and students alike (Nwalo, 2005; Okorafor & Iheaturu, 2005). Consequently, the catalogers are short on possessing adequate and sufficient skills needed to perform their duties. Therefore, this investigation seeks to survey opinions of catalogers in Nigerian university libraries on the use of mentoring for skill development. It is designed to assess catalogers' opinions on mentoring and their perceptions on mentoring for skill development in the profession in Nigerian University Libraries.

Previous studies

Librarian training spans 18–24 months after the first degree (Fleet, 1995). Outside the formal educational training,

other training models directed at promoting professional development include: internship, professional institutes, one-on-one training, conferences, workshops, job exchanges and self-directed study (Trainer, 1989). Mentoring as a re-training program for librarians in the university library is often overlooked and has received little attention. Cataloger mentoring is an established developmental process of learning by which an experienced, cataloger takes responsibility and relates well with less experienced or new catalogers to facilitate their training and development until they have acquired the needed skills in the profession (for the benefit of the individuals as well as that of the organization.)

The term mentor is often heard in conversations. Famous athletes refer to their coaches as mentors. Business leaders talk about mentoring the newly hired in company operations while academic institutions place students in apprenticeships with mentors doing the job they hope to do someday. Studies on the usefulness of mentoring to professions indicated that mentoring contributes to: retention and recruitment of talent, succession plans, knowledge management and transfer, stress reduction and productivity (Clutterbuck & Abbot, 2009). Research on mentoring acknowledges that there is much to gain by building mentoring into the daily practice of leaders and managers at all levels and in all kinds of organizations (Russell & Adams, 1997). Purported gains of mentoring include faster promotion rates, career satisfaction and reduced stress for the mentee. Whereas, mentors derived fulfillment and satisfaction for support they provide to the young/neophytes. In addition, it improves mentors' leadership, organisational and communication skills, as well as awareness of their own learning gaps and offers opportunities to pass on knowledge, skills and experiences. To the organizations mentoring increases employee's productivity, and enhances commitment with lower turnover, widening of skills base and competencies in line with organisation goals. It also increases staff morale and job satisfaction, and factors into succession plans (Russell & Adams, 1997). Because it facilitates development of competencies, employers have increasingly explored mentoring mechanisms to create and sustain the competitive advantage and have adopted mentoring to fulfill employees' personal career goals. Studies in business, education, health, and related disciplines demonstrated mentoring as a valuable part of the framework that supports the career development of workers in personnel, professional, and educational pursuits (Mckimm, Carol, & Mark, 2003). Mentoring studies conducted in the library profession appear to be on the increase (Munde, 2002). As in other professions, it is increasingly used for recruitment and retention in the library setting (FOLIO, 2008; Zhang, Deyoe, & Matveyeva, 2007). Osborn (2003) noted that UK and American librarians use it as a valuable career development tool, while the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

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