

TRAINING NEEDS OF PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFF IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Paraprofessional staff are vital to the operational efficiency of university libraries in Abia State, Nigeria, yet their training needs remain underexplored. This study investigates the specific training requirements, available training sources, challenges faced and potential solutions to enhance the performance of paraprofessionals in university libraries in Abia State. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 43 paraprofessionals via a structured questionnaire. Findings reveal critical training needs in cataloguing, digital resource management, library automation, information literacy, and customer service. Key training sources include workshops, in-house training, online courses and academic qualifications, though access is limited by financial constraints, inadequate tailored programs and unsupportive institutional policies. Suggested strategies include institutional funding, flexible schedules and collaborations with professional organizations among others. The study recommends structured training programs to enhance paraprofessionals' skills, improve library services and support academic goals.

Keywords: Paraprofessional staff, training needs, university libraries, Abia State, Nigeria.

Introduction

University libraries in Nigeria serve as critical hubs for teaching, learning, and research, providing access to information resources and services that support the academic community. While professional staff called librarians often focus on policy formulation, administration and specialized technical functions, paraprofessional staff, commonly referred

to as library officers and assistants handle much of the day-to-day operational work. Their responsibilities typically include shelving, circulation services, assisting users with basic queries, cataloguing, classification and in some cases, providing digital support. Unlike professional staff known as the librarians, who usually hold advanced degrees in Library and Information Science, paraprofessionals often possess certificates or diplomas, yet they remain crucial to the smooth functioning of library systems (Adeyemi, 2021; Eze & Okeke, 2022).

In the library context, training needs refer to the gap between the skills required for effective performance in a given role and the actual skills possessed by staff members. They encompass both technical and soft skills necessary to deliver quality library services. These include competencies in cataloguing and classification, the use of Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS), digital resource management, information literacy instruction, communication and customer service. Identifying and addressing training needs ensure that staff are equipped to perform their duties competently and adapt to evolving user expectations (Eze & Ummnakwe, 2022; Patel & Kim, 2023).

The relationship between training needs and paraprofessional performance is direct and significant. Where training gaps persist, paraprofessionals are unable to meet the demands of a technologically advancing academic environment, resulting in inefficiencies, low job confidence, and reduced user satisfaction (Okoye & Nwosu, 2021). Conversely, adequate training enhances their technical and interpersonal skills, improves service delivery and boosts the overall reputation of university libraries (Johnson & Patel, 2023). Globally, paraprofessional staff are expected to continuously update their skills to remain relevant in the digital information age (Johnson, Smith, & Carter, 2023). However, challenges such as

limited funding, weak institutional policies and lack of structured development programs hinder their ability to acquire the required competencies (Adebayo, 2024; Agu & Anyaoha, 2023).

From preliminary observations by the researcher, it appears that paraprofessionals in Abia State university libraries are not adequately exposed to the requisite training that would enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively. Furthermore, many of them do not have a clear understanding of what their training needs are. This knowledge gap has implications for library service delivery and academic support in Nigerian universities. It is against this background that this study investigates the training needs of paraprofessional library staff at Abia State University (ABSU) and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), with the aim of enhancing their performance and aligning with contemporary library standards.

Statement of the Problem

Paraprofessionals in university libraries in Abia State, Nigeria, are indispensable, handling critical tasks like resource access and technical support. However, their limited academic qualifications often diplomas or certificates do not equip them for modern library challenges, such as operating ILMS or addressing complex user inquiries. On the job experience alone is insufficient to bridge this gap, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Eze & Umunnakwe, 2022). Without targeted training, paraprofessionals often find it difficult to keep pace with technological changes, which results in decreased efficiency,

lower user satisfaction and limited opportunities for professional growth. This study is set to investigate training needs of Paraprofessional staff in university libraries in Abia State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the training needs of paraprofessionals in university libraries in Abia State, Nigeria, with the following objectives:

1. Identify specific training needs to enhance paraprofessionals' performance.
2. Determine available training sources to address skill gaps.
3. Examine challenges faced by paraprofessionals in acquiring training.
4. Propose solutions to overcome these challenges.

Literature Review

Paraprofessionals are essential to university library operations, managing tasks like circulation, shelving and user assistance. They serve as the first point of contact for users, enhancing accessibility to both traditional and digital resources (Eze & Okeke, 2022). Their role supports academic success by ensuring efficient resource access, particularly in resource-limited settings like Abia State (Johnson & Patel, 2023). Paraprofessionals also foster a welcoming library environment, building trust with users and improving the library's campus reputation (Adeyemi, 2021).

Modern library roles require paraprofessionals to master technical skills, such as using ILMS and digital databases and soft skills, like customer service (Eze & Umunnakwe, 2022). Training in cataloguing, information literacy and communication is critical to meet user demands and boost job confidence (Patel & Kim, 2023; Adebayo, 2024). Without these skills, paraprofessionals struggle to support tech-savvy users, leading to inefficiencies.

Training sources include in-house workshops, online courses, professional association seminars and partnerships with external organizations (Okoye & Nwosu, 2021). Online platforms offer flexibility, while associations like the Nigerian Library Association provide specialized training (Patel & Kim, 2023). Collaborations with tech companies can enhance technical skills, though access remains limited in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2024).

Paraprofessionals face financial constraints, time limitations, inadequate infrastructure and lack of institutional support (Eze & Umunnakwe, 2022). Limited budgets and poor internet access hinder participation in training programs (Adebayo, 2024). Additionally, low prioritization of paraprofessional development by library management discourages skill acquisition (Patel & Kim, 2023).

Adeniran et al. (2020) found that training in technical and user-service skills improved paraprofessional performance in South-West Nigerian university libraries, though funding and scheduling issues limited access. Nwabueze and Anike (2023) highlighted mentoring as an effective training method but noted challenges like poor mentor-mentee relationships. Agada and Tofi (2020) confirmed that training in automation and user support enhanced job performance, but inadequate funding and infrastructure persisted as barriers.

Research Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey and comprised 43 paraprofessional library staff from the selected university libraries, namely Abia State University (ABSU) and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU). Total enumeration sampling was used due to the manageable population size.

The universities were selected because they represent both state-owned and federal institutions in Abia State, each with functional university libraries that employ paraprofessional staff. Their inclusion provided a balanced perspective on training needs within different administrative and institutional contexts. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, “Training Needs of Paraprofessionals in University Libraries in Abia State Questionnaire” (TNPULASQ). The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher to the respondents in their offices. Data generated for the study were analysed using mean and frequency count. The process of administration and retrieval lasted one month.

Research Question 1: What are the potential sources of training available to paraprofessionals in Abia State?

Table 1: Mean responses on sources of training available to paraprofessionals in university libraries in Abia State Nigeria (N=43)

S/N	Sources of training	SA	A	D	SD	($\bar{x}$)	Decision
1	Workshops and seminars organized by professional associations provide valuable training for paraprofessionals.	10	17	9	7	2.56	Accept
2	In-house training by experienced librarians helps bridge skill gaps among paraprofessionals.	11	16	10	6	2.58	Accept

3	Online courses and webinars offer flexible training opportunities for paraprofessionals.	9	18	8	8	2.53	Accept
4	Acquiring additional academic qualifications would enhance job performance	12	14	9	8	2.59	Accept
Grand Mean							Accept

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025. Criterion mean = 2.50 Key= SA strongly agree; A agree; D disagree; SD strongly disagree; ($\bar{x}$) mean

Table 1 indicates that workshops by professional associations (M=2.56), in-house training (M=2.58), online courses (M=2.53), and additional academic qualifications (M=2.59) are viable training sources, with all means above 2.50 (Grand Mean=2.57). The study found moderate utilization of workshops, in-house training, online courses, and the pursuit of additional academic qualifications. These findings correspond with Adebayo and Olayemi (2021), who observed similar trends in West African university libraries. However, the limited strength of agreement among respondents suggests a lack of consistent access and structured delivery of these training opportunities. This supports Onwubiko (2022), who noted the absence of strategic training programs tailored specifically to the evolving roles of paraprofessionals.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 2: What specific training needs will enhance paraprofessionals' performance in university libraries?

Table 2 Mean responses on training needs will enhance the performance of paraprofessionals in university libraries (N=43)

S/N	Training needs	SA	A	D	SD	($\bar{x}$)	Decision
1	Paraprofessionals require training in cataloguing and classification to improve service delivery	28	11	3	1	3.53	Accept

2	Knowledge of digital resources and electronic databases is essential for paraprofessionals.	30	9	3	1	3.60	Accept
3	Training on library automation systems will enhance paraprofessionals' efficiency.	26	12	4	1	3.47	Accept
4	Information literacy and research skills training are necessary for paraprofessionals.	25	13	4	1	3.44	Accept
5	Customer service and communication skills training will improve interactions with library users.	27	10	4	2	3.44	Accept
Grand Mean							Accept

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025. Criterion mean = 2.50 Key= SA strongly agree; A agree; D disagree; SD strongly disagree; ($\bar{x}$) mean

Table 2 shows that paraprofessionals require training in cataloging and classification (M=3.53), digital resources and databases (M=3.60), library automation systems (M=3.47), information literacy (M=3.44), and customer service (M=3.44). All mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating strong consensus (Grand Mean=3.50). The findings of this study highlight critical training needs among paraprofessional library staff in university libraries in Abia State. Participants overwhelmingly indicated that they require training in cataloguing and classification, digital resource management, library automation systems, information literacy and customer service. These competencies are essential for adapting to evolving user expectations and digital library services, aligning with earlier research by Eze and Umunnakwe (2022) and Patel and Kim (2023), who emphasized the growing demand for technical and user-service skills among paraprofessionals in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What challenges do paraprofessionals face in acquiring training?

Table 3 Mean responses on the challenges paraprofessionals face in acquiring training to meet the demands of their roles in university libraries (N=43)

S/N	challenges	paraprofessionals	face	in	SA	A	D	SD	($\bar{x}$)	Decision
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acquiring training										
1	Lack of financial support limits paraprofessionals' access to training programs.	22	13	5	3	3.26	Accept			
2	Limited time and workload pressure prevent paraprofessionals from attending training sessions.	9	10	12	12	2.26	Reject			
3	Inadequate training opportunities tailored to paraprofessionals hinder their career growth.	19	14	6	4	3.12	Accept			
4	Low motivation and lack of recognition discourage paraprofessionals from seeking training.	16	15	7	5	3.00	Accept			
5	unfavorable institutional policies or support for continuous professional development restrict paraprofessionals' training opportunities.	8	13	7	5	3.02	Accept			
. Grand Mean						2.93	Accept			

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025. Criterion mean = 2.50 Key= SA strongly agree; A agree; D disagree; SD strongly disagree; ($\bar{x}$) mean

Table 3 reveals challenges including lack of financial support (M=3.26), inadequate tailored training (M=3.12), low motivation (M=3.00), and unfavorable institutional policies (M=3.02). Workload pressure (M=2.26) was not a significant barrier (Grand Mean=2.93).

The study revealed several challenges that impede training acquisition. These include insufficient financial support, the absence of training programs specifically designed for paraprofessionals, low motivation due to poor recognition, and restrictive institutional policies. These findings echo the work of Obasi and Nweze (2023), who identified financial constraints and weak institutional support as major barriers to professional development in South-East Nigerian university libraries. Interestingly, workload pressure was not considered a significant challenge, which contrasts with the general belief that time constraints are a primary hindrance to training participation (Nnamani, 2021).

Research Question 4: What strategies can be used to overcome these challenges?

Table 4 Mean responses on the solutions to overcome the challenges faced by paraprofessionals in acquiring training (N=43)

S/N	solutions to overcome the challenges faced o by paraprofessionals in acquiring training	SA	A	D	SD	($\bar{x}$)	Decision
1	Universities should provide funding and sponsorship for paraprofessionals' training	26	11	4	2	3.44	Accept
2	Flexible training schedules should be introduced to accommodate paraprofessionals' workloads.	24	13	4	2	3.40	Accept
3	Collaboration with professional organizations can increase training opportunities for paraprofessionals.	22	14	5	2	3.33	Accept
4	Universities should develop tailored training programs specific to paraprofessionals' roles in library services.	3	13	5	2	3.35	Accept
5	Institutions should implement awareness campaigns to inform paraprofessionals about available training opportunities.	21	14	6	2	3.30	Accept
	Grand Mean					3.36	Accept

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025. Criterion mean = 2.50 Key= SA strongly agree; A agree; D disagree; SD strongly disagree; ($\bar{x}$) mean

Table 4 proposes solutions to the challenges that impede training acquisition. They include institutional funding (M=3.44), flexible schedules (M=3.40), professional collaborations (M=3.33), tailored training programs (M=3.35), and awareness campaigns (M=3.30), all accepted with a Grand Mean of 3.36. To address these challenges, respondents supported practical solutions such as increased institutional funding, the creation of flexible training schedules, collaboration with professional organizations, development of customized training programs, and awareness campaigns to inform paraprofessionals of available

opportunities. These proposed solutions are in line with previous recommendations by Agu and Anyaoha (2023) and Okechukwu and Mba (2022), who advocated for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to paraprofessional development in Nigerian academic libraries.

This study confirms that while paraprofessionals are integral to the effective functioning of university libraries, their ability to contribute meaningfully is hindered by gaps in training access and institutional support. Addressing these gaps through structured, well-funded, and context-specific training initiatives is essential to enhancing their professional growth and service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve the training and professional development of paraprofessional staff in university libraries in Abia State:

1. University Management should allocate dedicated budgets for the continuous training and development of paraprofessionals, particularly in digital skills, cataloguing and user services. Adequate funding will help overcome financial barriers and support participation in relevant training programs.
2. Library Administrators should design and implement structured, role-specific training programs tailored to the current and emerging responsibilities of paraprofessionals. These programs should be practical, skill-oriented, and aligned with technological advancements in library services.

3. Human Resource Departments of the universities should introduce flexible training schedules to accommodate paraprofessionals' workloads. This will encourage participation without disrupting essential library operations.
4. Library Management should establish partnerships with professional bodies such as the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and other relevant organizations to provide regular workshops, webinars, and certification opportunities for paraprofessionals.
5. University Libraries should conduct awareness campaigns to inform paraprofessional staff of available training opportunities and the benefits of skill development. These campaigns can be facilitated through internal bulletins, orientation sessions or staff meetings.
6. Policy Makers and Governing Councils of the universities should review institutional policies to formally recognize and prioritize the professional development of paraprofessionals. This may include incorporating training mandates into performance appraisals and promotion criteria.

Conclusion

This study has shown that paraprofessionals are indispensable to the effective functioning of university libraries in Abia State. Their training needs centre on technical competencies such as cataloguing, automation and digital resource management, as well as soft skills like customer service and information literacy instruction. Available training sources are present but underutilized, while financial, institutional and motivational barriers

hinder access to training opportunities. Practical strategies such as funding, flexible scheduling, partnerships and targeted awareness can help address these gaps.

The contribution of this study lies in drawing attention to the specific training needs of paraprofessionals in Nigerian university libraries, an area often overshadowed by research on professionals known as librarians. By highlighting both challenges and practical solutions, the study enriches the body of knowledge in library and information science (LIS) and provides actionable insights for library managers, policymakers and LIS educators. Addressing these training needs will not only improve paraprofessional performance but also enhance overall library service delivery and user satisfaction.

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