

**TRAINING PRACTICES AMONG PARA-PROFESSIONAL STAFF FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN KOGI STATE**

**By**  
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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research work was to determine the training practices among para-professional staff for effective service delivery in academic libraries in Kogi State, The descriptive survey design and total enumeration technique were used as design and sample technique respectively. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages and presented in tables for clarity. The population of the study comprised of all the para-professional staff of the Kogi State University Library, Anyigba and the Kogi State College of Education Library, Ankpa. The major findings showed that para-professional staff had a variety of training needs; that training opportunities available for them were very limited, and that staff based their utilization on availability rather than needs. Factors such as lack of fund and lack of technological literacy hindered effective service delivery. Strategies that can enhance effective service delivery were also indicated. It was recommended were given that the para-professionals take training seriously and avail themselves of every opportunity to train, the university and college management should include in their methods of training para-professionals newer and appropriate methods and approaches, organize a regular (annual) free and affordable training workshops for staff, and Government, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies and individuals should be encouraged to intervene and support the academic libraries with funds so as to accelerate the training of para-professionals for effective service delivery.

**Introduction**

Academic libraries are part of the tertiary institutions. These academic libraries support the objectives of these institutions which include teaching, learning and research at high levels. They are the heart of the intellectual life of academic communities basically established to provide information materials of all sorts to back up the academic programs of the college. This is because no academic excellence will be achieved without a good library to back up its teaching, research and other community mandates. Today, in this information age, academic libraries are no longer confined to buildings on campuses but they are a new hybrid learning space, serving a far broader purpose. Changes in libraries in recent years have resulted in the need for new or expanded skills, abilities and knowledge of para-professional library staff. These

changes include the implementation of new technologies such as computer-based cataloguing, automated circulation system, online access to machine-readable bibliographic databases and the development and formalization of personnel policies and procedures. Hence, the awareness of the library para-professionals of the need for continuous training, because of the increasing variety of information formats and library services is highly required.

In this vein, Khan and Bhatti (2012), emphasized that due to changing needs of library users, the libraries also need to be changed. A dynamic environment like academic libraries require professional and para-professional staff to have strong abilities in library services delivery for all types of print and electronic information retrieval. Human resources, unarguably, constitute an integral part of organizations. Without the input of human resources, the objectives of setting up organizations will be defeated. Most libraries have a mission to offer a high quality service to all their users. The performance of para-professional library staff determines to a large extent the quality of the customer satisfaction and has a significant impact on the contribution that libraries can make to their communities. They have a major role to play in achieving the objectives of the library. Fitzgibbons (2008), posits that computer skills are requisite for library work in general while the librarians and para-professional library staff must have a high enough level of knowledge to trouble-shoot and assist clients in all areas of service need. The knowledge needed can be acquired through regular training and development. However, Fitzgibbons (2008), reiterates that lack of adequate training for required tasks particularly as regard technology has been identified as one of the causes of workplace stress in academic libraries.

Training can be understood as the process of teaching employees new skills that are essential to perform their jobs. It is usually applied immediately after recruitment, but in some organizations, employees undergo training on a periodic basis that can be understood as

"developmental training." Training, therefore, is a systematic development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by employees to perform adequately on a given task or job (Al-Ajlouni, Athamneh, & Jaradat. 2010; Olaniyan & Ojo, 2008). Fitzgibbons (2008) further opines that training of professional and para-professional library staff can provide the confidence that limits mental techno stress. It is in recognition of the importance of training that this study is designed to determine the training practices among para-professional staff for effective service delivery in academic libraries in Kogi State

### **Statement of the Problem**

Para-professionals have become a main pillar of success for students in higher institution of learning. The number of para-professionals needed in schools grows each school year. Para-professional library staff are faced with the challenges of fast change in the method of library operations and services, from traditional/manual method to digital method and this can be attributed to the introduction of new technologies. Modern management techniques have shown that all levels of staff should benefit from training programs.

However, researches have shown that professional librarians are usually given better opportunities while the para-professional library staff who also need training are often neglected or are denied such opportunities through rigid bureaucratic processes. Training of para-professional library staff is very necessary because they are involved in the day-to-day processing and organization of materials in the library. The lack of adequate training for the everyday roles and responsibilities of para-professionals affects the performance of the students they serve, and can lead to poor job satisfaction and longevity. Therefore, the problem of this study put in question form is: what are the training practices among para-professional staff for

effective service delivery in Kogi State University and Kogi State College of Education Libraries?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research work was to determine the training practices among para-professional staff for effective service delivery in academic libraries in Kogi State, with the specific objectives to;

1. Examine the kinds of training available for para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.
2. Find out the training programmes attended by the para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.
3. Ascertain the benefits of training the para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.
4. Identify the factors hindering the training of para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.
5. Determine the strategies for enhancing the training of para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Training Needs***

Training is crucial for organizational development and success, it is fruitful to employers and employees in any organization. An employee will become more efficient and productive if he or she is well trained. Training has been defined by a number of scholars and trainers as "change agent." Steinmitz (1968), defined training as a process of utilizing a systematic and

organized procedure by which non personnel learn technical knowledge and skills for a definite purpose.

Pepper (2001), defines training as being the organised process concerned with the acquisition of capability or the maintenance of existing capability. In comparison, Buckley and Caple (2000), sees training as a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skill, or attitude through learning experience, to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose in the work situation is to enable an individual to acquire abilities in order that he or she can adequately perform a given task or job. Both definitions are concerned with improving overall performance as a result of training.

According to Eze (2012), training is a public or private education program directly applicable to work situation. When there are lapses or loopholes in work efficiency and expected productivity, it means that the workers involved need more and better skills and knowledge to be gained through training.

### ***Para-Professional Staff***

Oberg (2001) viewed Para-professional as a trained worker who is not a member of a profession but who assists a professional. Para-professionals in the library services are library associates and library technicians who assist the professional librarians in library-related task. The duties performed by them include database management, cataloguing, ready reference and serials and monograph processing. In terms of qualifications, the para-professionals of the library services usually hold Diplomas in library science, Assistant Library Officer Certificate (ALO), and other library-related certificates. Within the context of the Nigerian government public services, para-professionals in the public libraries are those staff holding the post of "Assistant Library Officer"; "Senior Assistant Library Officer"; "Library Attendant" and "General

Assistant". Examples of para-professional position titles include: interlibrary loan assistant, catalog assistant, periodicals supervisor, reference assistant etc.(Wikipedia.com:2021)

According to the Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science (ODLIS), a para-professional is a member of the library support staff, usually someone who holds at least a diploma in library science, trained to understand specific procedures and apply them according to pre-established rules under normal circumstances without exercising professional judgment Para-professionals are usually assigned high-level technical support duties, for example, in copy cataloging and serials control.

### ***Challenges and Strategies for Enhancement***

Challenges are obstacles and they are impediments which when overcome leads to opportunities. But due to the information age we are into today, there are a lot of factors militating against effective service delivery in academic libraries. Meggisson (2001), Nwalo (2002), and Chiware(2007) established that the major problem of effective service delivery in academic library as lack of competency and this hinders organizing an effective utilization of information resources by users and other library staff. Some of the problems of lack of effective service delivery in libraries as identified by Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013) are: Lack of competency, poor technology literacy, lack of know-how of internet connectivity and its uses among para-professionals, lack of recent technological know-how, primitive information delivery, poor library staff/user relationship, slow articulation of user needs, etcetera.

Tanawade (2011) in Jowkar(2008), opined that the major challenges to effective information service delivery in the 21st century are:

- Lack of competency: Some para-professionals in Nigeria are not competent to take on the challenging role of the 21st century information service delivery. They are averse to

technology and perceive the application of computers to library work as a 21st century librarian and Effective Information Service Delivery aberration. Tanawade (2011), asserts that many para-professionals lack confidence in the face of increasing information technology. This slows service delivery and retards productivity.

- Lack of technology literacy: Some para-professional library staff lack the requisite technological literacy needed for a 21st century library service. Technological literacy can be viewed as the ability to responsibly use appropriate technology to communicate, solve problems, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, design and create information to improve learning in all subject areas and acquire lifelong knowledge and skills in the, 21st century. Edem (2008), states that the major challenge facing the 21st century library is not underfunding but the poor performance of library staff and information professionals in the developing countries as a result of poor ICT skills.

To be able to deliver effective library services in this age of information explosion, para-professionals needs to acquire 21st century ICT skills that is required. Para-professionals should be willing to improve their traditional method of operation by retraining themselves to avoid being obsolete and their job hijacked by other ICT professionals in this digital era. Nwalo(2002), pointed out that staff training and retraining is the panacea for the success of any library project. Para-professionals and librarians should change their attitude towards training because it will bring out the best in them. Information and telecommunication technology in libraries is a new concept which has changed the trend of library operations. To overcome the low comfort level of technologies there is need to embark on result-oriented training practices for para-professionals.

Onuoha, Anyanwu, Ossai-Onah, & Amaechi (2015), argued that if we must innovate and create avenues for successful change that will culminate in efficient library service delivery, we must embrace information and communications technology.

The era of confining ourselves to traditional forms of librarianship are gone, if there must be a shift in services offered, there must first be a shift in our professional mind-set Library and information professionals must be ready for change. Demands for change are both external and internal and as we have seen, outside factors include legislation, technology, socio-economic forces, the political agenda, etc., while those from inside include re-orientation, the new function of libraries, leaders and reorganization (Tarn and Robertson. 2002). They further buttressed that however, change does not happen by itself; people make it happen.

### **Research Method**

The design of this study was the descriptive survey. Survey design is appropriate because the researcher made use of the sample data based on the views and opinions of the respondents as well as reference resources in the given population to investigate, describe the explain the state of training of para-professionals in libraries. This design is suitable for this study because, it will involve a systematic and comprehensive collection of information about para-professional library staff on the training needs of para-professional library staff for effective service delivery in Kogi State. It is also appropriate because the findings can be generalized to other academic libraries especially in Nigeria.

### **Results and Discussion**

**The kinds of training available for para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.**

**Table 1:** Reponses on the kinds of training available for para-professional staff of the academic libraries

<b>N</b>	<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Decision</b>
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1.	Bachelor Degree in Library and Information Science (BLIS)	24	66.7	12	33.3	Available
2.	Orientation course	30	83.3	6	16.7	Available
3.	Supervisory training	24	66.7	12	33.3	Available
4.	workshop	24	66.7	12	33.3	Available
5.	Seminar/conferences	24	66.7	12	33.3	Available
6.	ICT training	12	33.3	24	66.7	Not Available
7.	In-house training	36	100	0	0	Available
8.	SLA courses	12	33.3	24	66.7	Not Available
9.	ALO courses	12	33.3	24	66.7	Not Available

The result of the study revealed that there were various kinds of training made available for para-professional library staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State. They include: Bachelor Degree in Library and Information Science (BLIS). Orientation courses, supervisory training, workshops, seminars/conferences. ALA (2013), revealed that library staff receives most of their training on the job. ALA specifically outline areas that training can be given to library para-professionals that will enable them to perform their duties in order to direct library users to standard references, organizing and maintaining periodicals, preparing volumes for binding, handling interlibrary loan requests, preparing invoices, performing routine cataloging and coding of library materials, and retrieving information from computer databases include orientation courses, supervisory training, workshops, seminars/conferences, ICT training, in-house training etc.

**Specialized training programmes attended by the para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.**

**Table 2:** Responses on the specialized training programmes attended by the para-professional staff

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	<u>Mean</u> ( <u>X</u> )	Decision
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1.	BLIS Degree programme	6	0	12	18	1.8	Rejected
2.	SLA courses	6	6	12	12	2.2	Rejected
3.	ALO courses	6	6	12	12	2.2	Rejected
4.	Cataloging and Classification	24	12	0	0	3.7	Accepted
5.	User Instructions	24	12	0	0	3.7	Accepted
6.	Shelving and Shelf reading	30	6	0	0	3.8	Accepted
7.	Web Searching	0	6	12	18	1.7	Rejected
8.	Minor System Maintenance and troubleshooting	0	6	12	18	1.7	Rejected

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The study revealed that the para-professionals of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State have attended various training sessions to ensure effective service delivery. From the data gathered, the training programmes that were attended by para-professionals of the library include cataloging and classification, user instructions, shelving and shelf reading, which from the findings and mean scores are the most common programmes available in this library. Keeling and Kallus cited in Onifade (2001) outlined some of these training methods that can be employed in libraries, and should be adopted by .the National library that will achieve the best results in terms of cost effectiveness and sustainability to include; on- the -job training, in- house lecture/demonstration, Orientation and Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) and job rotation are particularly useful training methods for both old and new employees. While on- the -job training enables both new and old staff acquire the necessary skills and attitudes, orientation programmes are design acquaint staff with the activities of the organization and it is usually for new employees.

**The benefits of training the para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State**

**Table 3:** Responses on the benefits of training para-professional staff

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (X)	Decision
1.	Familiarization with the 21 <sup>st</sup> century library challenges and solution	24	6	6	0	3.5	Accepted
2.	It enhances job performance	24	6	6	0	3.5	Accepted
3.	Development of interest in librarianship	18	6	6	6	3.0	Accepted
4.	It enhances the understanding of library policies	18	6	6	6	3.0	Accepted
5.	It helps in effective and efficient service delivery	18	6	12	0	3.2	Accepted
6.	Helps users in searching information electronically	12	12	6	6	2.8	Accepted
7.	It impact positively on service rendition to users	12	12	6	6	2.8	Accepted
8.	It brings about professionalism	12	18	6	0	3.2	Accepted

The study revealed that para-professionals position about training is that, it is very beneficial. The effects of training para-professionals is evident in helping them to familiarize themselves with the 21st- century library challenges and solutions, enhances their job performance, help them develop interest in librarianship, enhances their understanding of library policies, helps them in effective services delivery, helps users in searching information electronically, impact positively on service rendition to users, and brings about professionalism. Oke and Oguntuase (2010) affirmed that training and development of library staff in any academic library contributes significantly to productivity because trained staff are motivated and better equipped to utilize their knowledge, skills, and abilities. It is imperative to note that commitment to one's job is rooted in training.

**The factors hindering the training of para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State**

**Table 4:** Reponses on the factors hindering the training of para-professional staff

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	<u>Mean</u> ( <u>X</u> )	Decision
1.	Lack of funds	4	1	1	0	3.5	Accepted
2.	Shortage of Personnel or staff	4	1	1	0	3.5	Accepted
3.	Unequal selection of para-professional library staff for training by library's Management	4	1	0	1	3.3	Accepted
4.	Lack of Management's interest in training of para-professional	5	1	0	0	3.8	Accepted
5.	Negative attitude of para-professional library staff towards training	2	2	1	1	2.8	Accepted

The result of this study also revealed that various factors hinders training which ranges from lack of funds, shortage of personnel or staff, and lack of management's interest in training of para-professionals. Scholars whose findings are in compliant with findings of this study are Meggison (2001), Nwalo (2002) & Chiware (2007). They disclosed that the major factor hindering training of para-professionals is lack of funds. Ezeani (2009) in agreement added that training requires funding. Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013) asserted that the major factor that hinder training for effective service delivery are lack of competency, poor technology literacy, lack of know-how of internet connectivity and its uses among para-professionals, lack of recent technological know-how, primitive information delivery, poor library staff/user relationship, slow articulation of user needs, etcetera.

**The strategies for enhancing the training of para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.**

**Table 5:** Mean Responses on the strategies of enhancing the training of para-professional staff

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	<u>Mean</u> ( <u>X</u> )	Decision
1.	Adequate funds should be made available	24	6	6	0	3.5	Accepted
2.	Frequent and consent training programs should be organized for para-professional library staff	24	6	6	0	3.5	Accepted
3.	Para-professional library staff should take training as a motivational tool for maximum performance	18	6	12	0	3.2	Accepted
4.	Result oriented training programmes to help Library para-professionals overcome technophobia mentality should be organized	12	6	6	12	2.5	Accepted
5.	Library para-professionals should also seek opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and skills	24	12	0	0	3.6	Accepted
6.	Adequate manpower should be employed to release others for training	24	12	0	0	3.6	Accepted

Finally, the study disclosed some of the strategies that can be used to enhance the training of para-professional staff of the academic libraries under study in Kogi State. They range from adequate funds, frequent and constant training programs. The findings also revealed that para-professional library staff should take training as a motivational tool for maximum performance and Nwalo (2002), pointed out that staff training and retraining is the panacea for the success of any library project. These findings were in line with that of Onuoha, Anyanwu, Ossai-Onah, & Amaechi (2015), who argued that if we must innovate and create avenues for successful change that will culminate in efficient library service delivery; we must embrace information and communications technology.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made

- ❖ Para-professional staff should take training serious and avail themselves of every opportunity to train and be retrained on areas that equip them with the most experiences so as to update their skills.
- ❖ Library authorities and management should include in their methods of training para-professionals newer and appropriate methods and approaches that will simplify the training and learning of skills for effective service delivery.
- ❖ Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in collaboration with the library management should organize regular (annual) free and affordable training workshops for her members in order to train and keep them abreast of new skills and development in the profession.
- ❖ Library management also should draw a yearly plan of monthly routine meetings and the senior/skilled professionals should be used as resource persons to teach and train para-professionals on skills acquisition.
- ❖ Para-professional staff should personally utilize a large number of self-improvement training facilities online. This will go a long way in helping them master and acquire these skills themselves without much protocols and assistance.
- ❖ Government, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies and individuals should be encouraged to intervene and support academic libraries with funds so as to accelerate the training and retraining of para-professionals for effective service delivery in the academic libraries under study in Kogi State.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, one can conclude that the various kinds of training required for effective service delivery are enormous and wide ranging. These training are made only possible through training and retraining. The researcher used a descriptive research design for the study and five (5) research questions were used as a guide to the study. The findings of the study revealed that for the academic libraries under study in Kogi State to fully ensure effective service delivery, their para-professional staff must be well trained to acquire the varied skills that are needed to operate a library.

It was also encouraging to discover from the findings that para-professional staff from the academic libraries under study has some basic skills to ensure effective service delivery. These skills, though basic are a good platform that will enhance the acquisition of other special skills. The study also revealed that the academic libraries have different programs for training their para-professional staff to enhance effective service delivery. It was established that training para-professional library staff for effective service delivery is very beneficial and should be encouraged. However some challenges associated with the effective training of para-professional staff were identified just as some strategies for enhancing the training of para-professional staff were identified and recommendations also made by the researcher.

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