

STRATEGIES OF IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY AT A STATE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Numerous predominant practices in a Nigerian academic library are discussed in this study. These practices come to being because of various challenges facing libraries in the areas of establishment, management and planning to achieve the objectives for which they are established. Some of these practices are not new in libraries while some have taken a new dimension. It is equally established that they are affecting the library profession significantly, especially in the areas of personnel management and relationships. Recommendations made include: Urgent steps should be taken to ensure restoration of software use in the cataloging and classification of library resources; efforts should be directed towards effective personnel management and relationship development in the library; the library, in agreement with the establishment division, should allow retooling of some library staff whenever there's need for such so as to further consolidate the claim that the interest of the library personnel is paramount to the management; regular training in the form of workshops, symposia, conferences and meetings should be organized to better the library staff quality; consolidation/operation of flexible working hours should be given a careful consideration to allow for socialization of staff as at when

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necessary to relieve them of tension and work pressure and enhance performance of duties.

Introduction

Any library can be seen as an organisation. The word “organisation” describes a human grouping in which work is done and goal or mission is accomplished. Whatever the type of library—academic, school, public, national, special or research library—they have goals to accomplish, without which they cease to exist. So, personnel management and relationship in libraries can no longer be done haphazardly, by intuition or hunch.

To accomplish the goals for which they are established, three major resources are needed:

- Financial Resource (money or money’s worth),
- Material Resources (all tangible resources outside financial resources. For example, equipment, stationeries, etc),
- Human Resource/personnel (the people, their skills, experience, efforts, qualifications, etc.).

Effective combination of these resources will bring about goal attainment, but the most significant, most complex and principal component for the attainment of this success is the human resources—people at work.

Every organisation is expected to manage its human resources effectively and efficiently if it must expand, grow, survive and continue. Personnel (human resources) have been defined as the sum total of the knowledge and skills, creative abilities, talents and aptitudes obtained from the population for productive processes. It is therefore not out of place to say that human resources are the bedrock of organisational success. Management must be aware of this all-important resource and utilise it effectively.

Also, mention must be made that personnel management is a specialist function of management (Akubuiro, 1998). It is, therefore, required that a special unit be created to carry out this function. That unit, department or section must function under a structure.

Structure is the identifiable and predictable pattern of relationship within a work group. A sound structure must, among other things, be able to:

- Accomplish original tasks and satisfy personnel, This is to say that all structures must be so planned as to satisfy both organisational and individual goals.
- Give room for effective delegation of authority
- Have proper span of supervision,
- Show the different degree of specialization,
- Carry on with its line of communication. This is very important as it brings about freedom and flexibility in the workflow.

There are different types of libraries depending on the founding institution, materials stocked and the types of users. Some common ones include, but are not limited to, the following: National; Public; Academic; Special; Research; School; Private; Virtual; Electronic and/or Digital library. Particular attention would be given to academic library which is the focus of this paper. Therefore, functions for which academic libraries are set up would be considered.

The functions of academic libraries are derived from the objectives of the institution. An academic library's role is primarily to provide literature support to the educational and research activities of its parent institution. Academic libraries include those found in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics and other related colleges of higher learning. Functions of academic libraries include: selection and acquisition of materials pertaining to all the parent institutions it is interested in; organization of the materials through cataloguing, classification and physical arrangement of shelves; provision and maintenance of a library catalogue; provision of convenient accommodation for in-house library use of materials; lending of books to users; reference services; preparation of reading lists; compilation of bibliographies and abstracts; organization of user education on how to exploit the rich resources of the library; and promotion of culture through its acquisitions and bibliographic services.

In order to achieve these objectives, adequate provisions must have been made to permit division of labour such that related activities are grouped together to form two main departments which are: Readers Services and Technical Services. Units are created from these main departments and these units are headed by qualified personnel. The structure of the personnel in academic libraries is similar to all other categories of library - it is service-based. In order to fully satisfy users of the library, the personnel should employ the use of several strategies to meet users' information needs at all times. Some of the known strategies have been found to be mostly inadequate due to the complex nature of library users and sophistication of the information-generating gadgets which abound. This is a lot of challenge to the library personnel who should always be ahead of the information/library users. To meet these demands, then, library personnel must be sufficiently empowered with functional strategies that would enable them to satisfy their customers and remain relevant in the profession as a service-oriented one. This work, therefore, seeks to examine strategies of improving service delivery in the library system at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology in recognition of the fact that these are critical ways needed for optimal service delivery within this information-rich century.

Challenges of New Resources in Libraries

Information proliferation is a challenge to all librarians. Needed information resources are processed, packaged and presented to users in usable format through various means – manually and electronically. Many wonder why some people still find the libraries relevant in the present information age coupled with the fact that Nigeria is not a reading nation. Despite the challenges being faced by libraries, academic libraries are booming with activities due to the creativity of the personnel. These personnel are supportive in the area of teaching, research and development. Before the personnel will perform maximally, there is the need for proper coordination by the library management. What strategies have been adopted by Ladoke Akintola University Library, Ogbomoso to improve its service delivery becomes a puzzle that needs to be investigated.

The focus of this study is to examine the dominant practices guiding personnel management and relationships at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomosho. The study is undertaken to attain the following objectives:

- (i) reveal the various practices dominant in the library at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology.
- (ii) find out the effectiveness of these practices in promoting good personnel management and relationship;
- (iii) identify the factor(s) militating against the effectiveness of these management practices in the library.

This study covers the main library of the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Ogbomosho and its teaching hospital library at Osogbo. Two categories of staff directly involved in the provision of services within the library, that is para-professional and professional librarians were included in this study. Every staff member was made to express his/her feelings on the issue of practices relating to personnel management and relationship as it affects their service delivery.

The study has revealed what personnel management and relationship, as they affect service delivery, are all about. Thus, it is hoped that it would assist the personnel develop positive attitude and embrace practices that would foster good relationship and consequently result in better service delivery to library users. The superior officers and management alike would be able to foster good relationship with their subordinates having revealed their weaknesses and areas of strength. The study makes a number of recommendations in this regard.

Conceptualizing Personnel Management in Libraries

The first and most significant operative function of personnel management generally, and in libraries in particular, is procurement. It is the function, which deals directly with the acquisition of the human resources (librarians and paraprofessionals). Any error made in the performance of this function makes the efforts and activities of the subsequent functions not result-oriented. It can also

be called the hiring of new employees. Procurement involves the following personnel management activities: manpower planning; recruitment; selection and placement.

The term word “Manpower” or “Human Resources” is not just the number of employees in a library at any given time. It is more complicated than that. A library may have a good number of staff and still be in dire need of some staff. Developing an organisational structure like the library results in jobs (work), which have to be done. It is very necessary to analyse jobs carefully, avoiding errors of omissions and commission, which may ground the whole library process.

Recruitment is the next personnel function after putting adequate manpower plan and job analysis in place. Recruitment is the creation of a pool of employable library personnel. From this pool, selection can be done before final placement. These three, recruitment, selection and placement, conclude the procurement process in any library. They flow one into the other.

The offer of employment, according to Nwachukwu (1988), is the culmination of all the events that have originated from the identification of positions for employment to reference checks. This is perhaps the most important step in the selection process. Any library would employ eggheads that could make things happen when it comes to information processing and dissemination.

Ogunbameru (2004) remarks that orientation is the planned introduction of new employees to their job functions (such as circulation routines, reference service, cataloguing and classification of library materials), coworkers and the organisation, while evaluation, according to Nwachukwu (1988), is necessary to ensure that the needs (performance of specific job functions such as charging and discharging of books) are being met. Also, he stated further that evaluation may be to determine the effectiveness of the library staff involved. The orientation aims at instilling first impression and attitude of the company, its objectives and its people. It will help to meet the employee’s need for acceptance and security (Nwachukwu, 1988). Maanen (1976) however notes that the experience of the new recruits have shown that many managers overlook the tremendous value of an effective orientation programme, especially for new employees, and reorientation for older employees.

Well-conducted researches have revealed that work itself is an extremely important consideration in motivation. It influences cultural values and determines the circumstances under which we live. Concern about work and its role in our lives continues to be an important issue (Terry & Franklin, 1982). In essence, the reason one gives much of oneself to work is that the work gives to that person much of what is sought.

Mention must be made that adequate and effective compensation can result in improved performance and productivity, increased employee loyalty and morale, and low turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness. However, poor compensation can result in the exact opposite of these desirable consequences. Bennett (1994) concluded that a remuneration policy has two objectives: (i) to attract and retain high-caliber workers and (ii) to provide incentives for increased effort. Employee morale can be enhanced through human relations, effective leadership, communication and consultation, disciplinary action, occupational health and safety.

Through effective leadership, employee morale could be maintained. We are entering a period in work relationships where any form of cruelty is becoming a ground for lawsuits. Effective communication is life itself whether within or outside the work setting. Good decisions, well-conceived plans, policy formulations, etc are only possible through effective communication.

In libraries, no one can get work done if it is not properly communicated - this includes ensuring that people understand what to do, how to do it, where and when to do it and by whom it should be done. When people are given effective communication, they are satisfied and they put in their best. It is therefore right to say that employees' morale can be maintained through effective communication.

Without power, there is no organisation and no order (Bierstedt, 1950). Power is important because it is necessary for coordinated human activity. The alternative to power is chaos, and chaos is not acceptable because of its woes. Power provides a refuge from chaos. Between chaos and power the latter always prevails (Berl, 1969). No doubt, when all the attributes earlier highlighted are well harnessed, job satisfaction of librarians becomes the order of the day.

In the managerial context and particularly management of the library, division of labour creates the need for a pyramid structure of authority and control. Delegation of duties to subordinates, accompanied by the devolution of authority necessary to implement decisions is essential for the efficient administration of large organizations such as the library.

Over the past twenty years literature on management has stressed two themes as central to the success or failure of organisations. The first approach has concentrated on operational issues, the day-to-day pursuit of operational excellence, how to create a well-run organisation. The second has concentrated on strategic dimensions, the importance of vision, mission and strategy to organisational success. Hence, to explore the extent to which university libraries have engaged with the task of providing strategic direction and leadership is increasingly associated with modern corporate leadership. So also are university librarians expected to be knowledgeable about organisational management and to be involved with day-to-day operational issues.

Library work is now mostly technology-driven and librarians are expected to brace up to the challenges by adopting relevant strategies needed to provide value-adding services to users in order to remain relevant in the profession. The use of Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) in the Library and information science skills has been widely reported as one of such strategies that can be adopted in order to consolidate on the relevance of librarianship and to ensure effective and efficient service delivery. (Ezeani and Ekere, 2009; Ozioko, Ezeani, & Omeje, 2009; Adebisi, 2009; Ahiauzu, 2008; as well as Armah, 2009) Ezeani and Ekere (2009) have further established that librarians and information professionals presently operate within a professional climate that is characterized by change. Ezeani (2005), furthermore, has posited that in developing countries such as Nigeria, libraries have had their budgets steadily on the decline. As a result, most Nigerian libraries have had to perform their services within a reduced purchasing power. Knowledge of the use of these new skills coupled with deployment of functional strategies will ensure that services are rendered more creatively and ensure the effective discharge of duties

even within a reduced budgetary allocation. Libraries that effectively manage and service customer interactions, turning them into relationships, create an advantage to win greater wallet share and are therefore more successful (Broderick, 2013).

The capability to select, implement and use technology successfully is critical in today's libraries. The challenge goes beyond simply meeting service levels and now requires libraries to be revenue generators, at least to sustain their services. Successful information providers deploy increasingly sophisticated and personalized strategies to up-sell and cross-sell information products and services to win wallet share. As these organizations transform call libraries into next generation contact libraries that provide world-class library and information service, they demand software solutions that are highly scalable yet cost-effective. Consequently, library users will have improved access to library resources that advance and enhance their personal, educational, and working lives.

Methodology

This study employed the use of descriptive survey research design, which falls within the empirical research methodology.

The population of this study consisted of all the forty-three (43) library staff of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho and their five (5) counterparts at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital, Osogbo making a total population of forty-eight (48).

The nature of the study permits all members of staff on duty to participate as subjects for the period the study lasted due to the fact that the population was not large. Any staff on leave was not included in this study so also were those personnel working in non-users service units. Out of a total population of forty-three (43) staff of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho only twenty-nine (29) participated fully in the study while all the five (5) staff members at their teaching hospital library, Osogbo were involved, using purposive sampling technique. The sample size was therefore thirty-four (34).

The only working instrument for this study was the questionnaire. It was tagged "Personnel Management and Relationships in Academic Libraries." The instrument, which

consisted of forty-eight (48) open and closed-ended questions, was divided into sections A and B. The personal data and general information comes first while section B formed the body of the questionnaire. Questions on human resource planning, common practices, personnel management and relationship directed towards improving service delivery were asked.

The researchers Personally administered copies of the questionnaire at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology main library on the first day while a professional colleague assisted in the subsequent administration and collection. This was due to the fact that few librarians who were stakeholders were performing other university assignments and could not be reached instantly. They were allowed to complete their questionnaire later through the assistance of the professional colleague who mailed the completed questionnaire to the researchers. The researchers had the privilege of being conducted round the various departments and sections in the library.

Five (5) copies of the questionnaire were sent to the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital Library, Osogbo, by proxy. These few copies were completed and returned promptly for analysis.

The data generated were carefully analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency counts and simple percentage. Tables were used in the presentation and analysis of the data. All the thirty-four (34) copies of the questionnaire administered on all staff of the library available to complete them at the main library and the teaching hospital library of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Osogbo, were found useful. This represents a 100% return rate. Out of the total of thirty (34) respondents, eighteen (53%) were male while sixteen (47%) were female. A careful examination reveals that 29 (85.3%) of the respondents were drawn from Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso main library while 05 (14.7%) represented LAUTECH Teaching Hospital Library, Osogbo. Out of the thirty-four (34) respondents, 18 (52.9%) had 1-5 years experience; 6 (17.6%) had 6-10years experience and 4 (11.8%) had 11-15 years experience

while others did not indicate their years of experience. It was further revealed that about six (17.6%) of the respondents started working at the library at inception while a greater number of respondents joined the services of the library later.

Table 1: Recruitment of personnel into the library for improving service delivery

Quality of personnel	Yes	Percentage
Qualified	30	88
Not qualified	03	9
Undecided	01	3
Total	34	100

The highest number (30) representing 88% of respondents agreed that qualified personnel are recruited into the practice of librarianship at LAUTECH, Ogbomoso. Three (9%) opined that non-qualified personnel are sometimes recruited into the library while only one respondent representing (3%) remained undecided.

The dominant practice concerning recruitment is that which allows personnel to be appointed any time a vacancy exists, unlike other practices that allow personnel intake once in a while or at the beginning of every new session. About 73.5% of the respondents supported this view while 26.5 % were against it. The library is actively involved in the short listing, interview and eventual recruitment of staff into the library at all levels, especially at the semi-skilled level, popularly referred to as para-professionals and at the level of skilled labour also known as professional librarians.

Table 2: Regularity of Orientation Exercise for Newly Recruited Staff/Types of Orientation Conducted to Improve Service Delivery

Frequency	Response	%	Type of orientation	Response	%
Regular	29	85.3	Structured	15	44.1
Not regular	04	11.8	Semi structured	12	35.3
Undecided	01	2.9	Not structured	03	8.8
Total	34	100		30	88.2

From Table 2, it was revealed that organization of orientation exercise for newly recruited personnel is a regular occurrence at the LAUTECH library. A total of 29 (85.3%) of respondents shared this opinion while 2.9% were indifferent. The type of orientation common in the library is the structured. Majority of professional librarians had at one time or the other enjoyed this programme. The semi-structured orientation programme organized by the professional staff is more popular among the para-professionals while non-structured orientation affects only the non-professionals and the unskilled personnel, and this accounted for only 8.8% of the respondents.

Table 3: Availability of Modern/Sophisticated Communication Gadget

Degree of availability	Frequency	Percentage
Readily available	14	41.2
Not available	17	50.0
Undecided	03	8.8
Total	34	100%

Table 3 indicates that the Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, has no adequate improved communication gadget hence, this negates the submission that libraries in Nigeria are Internet readily, which is a must for any 21st century library especially in apex institutions of learning such as the university. Effective communication is essential for service delivery to be improved – communication of ideas, directives, strategies and instructions cannot be achieved if the communication gadgets are not available.

Thus, a lot of staff productive time and strength would be wasted on physical movement to communicate with other library personnel whenever necessary.

Table 4: Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity of the Library Personnel among Colleagues, Subordinate and Superior Officers

Degree of efficiency & productivity	Among colleagues (%)	Subordinate to superior (%)	Superior to subordinate (%)
Very high	10 (29.4%)	08(23.5%)	09(26.5%)
High	10 (29.4%)	12 (35.3%)	13 (38.2%)
Average	11 (32.4%)	12(35.3%)	10(29.4%)
Low	3 (8.8%)	2 (5.9%)	01 (2.9%)
Undecided	-	-	01 (2.9%)

Table four shows that efficiency and effectiveness of the library personnel at LAUTECH in terms of productivity is reasonably high having cross-tabulated responses of colleagues against contemporaries, subordinates to superiors, and superiors to subordinates. About fifty-nine (58.8%) of the respondents submit that productivity was high among colleagues: coincidentally too, 58.8% of respondent say performance is equally high between subordinates and superiors, while 64.7%, that is, 21 respondents opine that efficiency and productivity between superior and subordinate is interestingly high. This further confirms the fact that the customer is truly king since library's stock-in-trade, which is information, is provided promptly at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso.

Table 5: Frequency of Development Programmes Organized for the Library Personnel Internally

Types of development programme	Frequency in percentage						
	No response %	None %	Weekly %	Monthly %	Quarterly %	Bi-annual %	Yearly %
i. Learned conferences	19(55.9%)	6(17.6)	-	-	4(11.8)	-	5(14.7)
ii. Workshops	18(52.9)	5(14.7)	1(2.9)	-	1(2.9)	2(5.9)	6(17.6)
iii. Seminar	15(44.1)	7(20.6)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	5(14.7)	4(11.8)
iv. Symposia	22(64.7)	8(23.5)	-	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)
v. Meetings	13(38.2)	5(5.9)	2(5.9)	3(8.8)	8(23.5)	1(2.9)	2(5.9)

Table five revealed that attendance at organized learned conferences is a rare occurrence in the LAUTECH library. A total of 17.6 percent of respondents have never attended any such conferences while only 11.8% and 14.7% respectively have attended one form of learned conference or the other on quarterly or yearly basis. Workshops, seminars, symposia and meetings are not regular occurrence at LAUTECH library as well. Eight (8) that is, 23.5% of the respondents, submitted that meetings are held on quarterly basis in the library (probably at the departmental or unit level since not many respondents indicated this). Five (14.7%) and four (11.8%) respondents respectively have participated in seminars on a bi-annual and yearly basis. In all, only sixteen respondents, representing 47.4%, indicate that meetings are held in the library. This suggests that meetings are not held at regular intervals because these responses spread from weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annually to yearly. In fact, other respondents do not see meeting as development programme hence a total of 38.2% respondent did not express their opinion in this item in questionnaire.

The result of the study indicates that the establishment of LAUTECH library has fulfilled its purpose in the areas of quality staff recruitment and organization of orientation programmes which have led to effectiveness, efficiency and productivity of personnel for prompt information service delivery in quality and

quantity. Also, the fact that the library management plays an active role in staff selection and recruitment means that the practice is one that is strategic enough and ensures qualitative staff development.

In the area of subject specialization, the spread of library personnel is one that allows effective functioning as an essential component of job performance. Regrettably, however, a low level of — the adoption of information communication technology was observed. This is probably due to lack of fund to acquire needed tools/maintain existing ones. The library has succeeded in being one of the first to embrace the use of TINLIB software but has done practically nothing visible to sustain the use of technology in the library after TINLIB went into extinction.

As a matter of fact, the strategy of LAUTECH library at improving service delivery in the area of personnel management and relationships also revealed some level of professionalism in the area of library management, job function and administration. This is due to the use of both official and unofficial types of communication in the library. Also, there exists good communication among colleagues, subordinates and superior staffers. About seventy-six percent (75.7%) of the respondents confirmed that there exists good communication in the library in terms of flow among the three categories of personnel.

Another observed strategy at LAUTECH library is that of relative permanence enjoyed by the staff. Once recruited to work in the library, such staff cannot be transferred to other departments in the university except as a punishment or when a member of staff is posted to the library from other departments as representatives of their departments such as Bursary and Registry. That is, a member of staff of either the registry or Bursary performing Registry or bursary functions in the library can be substituted or changed at any time when the need arises but the library staff recruited to perform library duties enjoy relative permanence on the job.

The major findings of this research work are presented in summary as follows: Professionalism was observed at LAUTECH library as a condition for selection and recruitment for efficiency and effectiveness in performance of duties at both para-professional and professional levels.

The fact that no library should waste the time of library users was confirmed as evidence in the timely delivery of information in quantity and quality. Also, the customer is treated to value-adding services in LAUTECH library.

Adequate consideration is being given to subject specialization of the professionals before selection and recruitment so as to ensure a good spread across all available disciplines, especially in the areas of science and technology.

Considering the availability of various training programmes and periodic acquisition of reading materials (books and non-books), the LAUTECH library was a good representation of a growing organism. This fulfils the fifth law of Ranganathan on librarianship.

While the study revealed the involvement of the library management in the selection and recruitment of staff, the affected personnel were not too happy about the arrangement that allows them to be sponsored for additional qualification in bond. In spite of some observed lapses, communication within the library among all categories of staff was cordial, encouraging and result-driven.

Conclusion

In the area of personnel management and relationships at LAUTECH library, there is room for improvement, in especially as regards the organization of training workshops, seminars, symposia, conferences and other professional gatherings such as meetings. No doubt, this will further facilitate effectiveness and efficiency in professional practice. All would enjoy even the dominant practices and individuals will demonstrate good sense of belonging thus advancing the cause and purpose of the library. Effort is on to also consolidate the areas of strength noticed as dominant cultural values guiding personnel management and relationships. This will further discourage staff turnover as enjoyed since inception.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this research work, the following recommendations are made for promotion of better dominant values

guiding personnel management and relationships in Nigerian university libraries, with particular reference to Ladoke Akintola University of Technology.

- Urgent steps should be taken to ensure restoration of software use in the cataloging and classification of library resources. This will make the library meet the challenges of a 21st century library.
- Effective personnel management and relationships cannot be experienced without adequate and timely communication. Efforts should be directed towards effective personnel management and relationship development.
- The library, in agreement with the establishment division should allow retooling of some library staff whenever there is need for such so as to further consolidate the claim that the interest of the library personnel is paramount to the management. These changes will definitely bring the best out of the affected personnel.
- Regular training in the form of workshops, symposia, conferences and meetings should be organized to improve the quality of library staff.
- Consolidation/operation of flexible working hours should be given a careful consideration to allow for socialization of staff as at when necessary in order to relieve them of tension and work pressure for enhanced performance of duties.

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