

Staff Development as Motivation for Paraprofessionals: A Case Study in Southern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Library paraprofessional staff in Southern Nigeria was surveyed on motivation for in-service training. The findings reveal that they are eager to take such opportunities, believing that in-service training will positively affect the prospect of their professional development. Staff development is generally considered a positive source of staff motivation, for it adds to their curriculum vitae and thus facilitates their job mobility. The institutions also stand to gain as paraprofessional staff helps to provide essential library services.

I. Introduction

Librarians are professionals with a degree in library or information science. Most, if not all, libraries employ not only librarians but also other staff. Due to the fact that the latter do not have a library degree, they are deemed as paraprofessionals. In Southern Nigeria, paraprofessionals go by various names, such as non-professional staff or non-academic staff in an academic institution.

With the advancement of information technology, many tasks used to be handled exclusively by librarians are now, to a greater or lesser degree, taken over by paraprofessionals. Therefore, the performance of paraprofessionals in a library is ever more essential to the quality of services a library renders to its users.

Traditionally, librarians are expected for their own professional development while paraprofessionals are neglected in this respect. Now that paraprofessional staff functions more and more importantly in a library, it is high time to stress on their staff development with a view to improving library services as a whole.

This study was therefore conducted to survey the paraprofessional staff in Southern Nigeria on their level of interest in further training or education and to assess the benefits of those who have undergone in-service training.

II. Literature Review

While commenting on job performance efficiency, Siggin (1992) stated that there is relationship between job satisfaction, staff performance, and productivity. The productivity of paraprofessional is paramount in every aspect. Appreciation of their contribution could be made by giving them more opportunity for improvement.

What can easily destroy an organization is the issue of job dissatisfaction. Voelck (1995) noted that insufficient participation in organizational communication and few contingent rewards, particularly in form of sincere and positive feedback, constitute a source of job dissatisfaction for the paraprofessional staff. Records show that there are already plans set in motion for development of staff at all levels.

Olorunsola and Bamijoko (2005) concluded that what is needed to uphold a system is a strong commitment to its implementation of its development plans, especially as it concerns this grade of staff. The paraprofessional's clear understanding of the nature of human motivation has been identified by Bryson (1990) as the key to successful and effective management of an organization. Where the staff is actively motivated, there is usually a clearly noticed improvement.

Herzberg and Snyderman (1959) identified some major factors they referred to as dissatisfiers. These include an institution's policy and administration, supervision, salary scale, working condition as well as interpersonal relationship. In their opinion, managing these factors may remove the issue of dissatisfaction.

Also, on what satisfies the paraprofessional, Billings and Kern (1990) concluded their investigation by stating that paraprofessionals expressed satisfaction with intrinsic rewards like the physical and intellectual environment of the library, supervision and working with patrons.

Wilson (1996) studied the performance of library trainees and concluded that the range of duties they undertake can induce libraries to seek way of increasing their paraprofessional staff. This means that their presence is really recognized.

Fojt (1995) postulated that what gets recognized gets done again even better. The recognition of the importance of paraprofessionals will surely draw attention to their improvement. Continuation of professional education as reported by Dawha and Atimo (1999) is so vital and a right support to professionalism.

In the same vein, Tan (2005) explained that a committed paraprofessional with required skills will be able to take on the challenges and excel to the level of expertise in librarianship.

Johnson (1998) saw people as the most valuable asset in the library profession only when there is willingness to share their talents and creativity which will provide needed services in a flexible manner.

Still on the value of investment on human development, Hurt and Sunday (2002) saw the investment as a way to move the institution forward and to prepare staff for new work required in the constantly changing environment of libraries.

Duncan and Robert (1991), after their survey, came to the conclusion that personal concerns, patron services, collegiality as well as professional competence form the underlying reasons for participation in continuing education by paraprofessional.

Abifarin (1997) believes that librarians socializing with the paraprofessional staff is a great motivating factor.

III. Methodology

Literature search shows that not much work on the aspect of in-service training for the paraprofessional staff in Southern Nigeria has been published. So a questionnaire with 12 items (see [Appendix 1](#)) was designed to deduce vital information on the views of the paraprofessional staff on the utilization of in-service training opportunities. Five libraries in Southern Nigeria were chosen for this survey. Among them are two academic libraries, one state library, one local branch of the National Library, and one special (corporate) library.

Twenty-five copies of the questionnaire were sent to each library. Only paraprofessional staff who had worked in the libraries for no less than 15 years was issued the questionnaires. One library officer in each establishment was engaged to distribute and collect the questionnaire. The questionnaire was issued to only staff that was available at the time the survey was conducted. The researcher later held interviews with some of the respondents. All the questionnaires were successfully collected. They were thereafter subjected to analysis based on percentages.

IV. Findings

The grade and position held by the paraprofessional staff interviewed ranged from clerical staff, library officers, head library attendants, assistant library officers, higher library officers to senior library officers. Also included are graduates in subject areas outside librarianship who are working as librarians in training. Respondents from each group were randomly selected. They have had the opportunity of going for one type of training or another since their appointment at the libraries.

The respondents valued in-service training as a welfare package extended to the staff and as a source of encouragement to make them more productive as well as to improve their morale. Their years of experience in the library profession ranged from

fifteen to twenty-five years. Also their ages ranged from 28 to 40 years. The respondents were asked to state in their opinion as what they considered the best way to reward staff who has served the library for many years. Their opinions are listed in Table 1. Twenty one (17%) of respondents agreed that in-service training is one of the ways to reward staff for their services to the library.

Table 1: Best Way to Reward Staff

Method	Percentage
Confirmation of one's appointment	(30)24
Additional increment/rapid promotion	(28)23
Yearly performance award	(27)22
Study leave	(21)17
Workshop and seminars	(17)14

Annual performance award or gifts could also motivate staff (17, i.e., 22%). Other incentives include additional increment and rapid promotion (28, i.e., 23%). Creating opportunity for one to attend workshops and seminars (17, i.e., 14%) as well as confirmation of one's appointment can equally motivate staff (30, i.e., 24%).

Their responses show that not everyone is willing to return to school at an advanced age. Some people may return to school just for the fun of being in school once more. It is also hoped that family commitment may equally prevent many from considering formal education at this level. To further assess them on this issue, they were asked to state how they would feel returning to academics in the light of their family commitments. Necessary information on the days of the week and time they would like to attend lectures was elucidated. At times, family commitments become an obstacle to people's further education. The opinion of the respondents on how they would feel if given opportunity to return to study in light of all their family commitments is quite commendable. Among their responses are these statements.

"I will feel free to return to academic environment."

"I will be excited to acquire more knowledge."

"In-service training with full pay is essential."

"I have to adjust so as to meet the necessary demands."

"I will feel happy and will not mind family problems."

"Determination can lead me through."

"It is okay since it is to improve my promotion prospects".

As a way of showing further approval, they proposed making out time from their present schedule to accommodate any change in their normal daily duties. Some feel that they can attend lectures at any time they are allowed and on any day. Others feel that weekend programmes organized between 6 a.m. to 8p.m. will suit them best.

Sometime ago, there was an opportunity in one of the institutions for people to be trained for the level of Diploma Certificate in Library Science. It happened that some of these paraprofessional staff missed that opportunity. Those who participated in the course were asked to state what benefits they had derived. Those who missed the course were asked to state why they had missed that opportunity. They were asked what their reaction would be if such an opportunity comes up again. At present, that programme could not continue due to logistic issues. The main problem is that the number of applicants was too small to fund the project. The respondents were finally asked to comment on what they think would be the achievement for a programme on staff development.

V. Discussion

The result of this survey shows that remaining as paraprofessional was not the fault of the staff but because they never had educational opportunities to upgrade to the professional category. It is the author's hope that the findings of this study will help library administrators or librarians to realize that paraprofessional staff attaches great importance to in-service training.

Paraprofessional staff is generally not promoted unless they have acquired more knowledge through one type of training or another. The majority of paraprofessional staff is willing to attend in-service training as it usually enhances their prospects in promotion. However, for those who can, opportunities should be given so that they can go back to school. They cannot improve if not given opportunity to study. Another way out is that in the absence of formal training, they can improve their knowledge through in-house training.

Finally, opportunities given to paraprofessional staff to attend seminars and workshops will also enable them to improve their performance of duties. The certificate they acquired from seminars or workshops will put them in a better position of being promoted. Staff development will improve paraprofessional staff's morale in workplace.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of the above survey clearly indicate that the paraprofessional staff believes that staff development or opportunity for further education is a highly motivating force that enhances productivity. This has not only improved their output but also raised their morale in the system. Training is usually accompanied by a certificate issued. These certificates are considered during the promotion process, which justifies for the necessity of such training.

Staff usually goes a long way to achieve what will improve their pay packet at the end of every month. It is, therefore, obvious that the achievement of every motivation in the direction of further education is tied to pay raise.

Records of the library services are usually collected and kept by paraprofessional staff. If they are better equipped academically, they will collect more valuable data. Generally speaking, the main benefit of education is to develop the potential of an individual. The fact that the ages of these staff have not been a problem in their quest for knowledge indicates their eagerness to develop themselves. Since these people are ready to sacrifice their time and are willing to pay for such training, a positive interest towards training or further education is established.

A library that has allowed its paraprofessional staff to engage in further education stands to gain in the long run. These workers will perform at a better rate and their morale up-lifted. Their performance always shows a difference as they try to apply the techniques and knowledge they have acquired. The major area where the effect of such training has been visibly demonstrated is in the area of information technology. It is not easy to employ and retain most computer operators. It is much easier to train paraprofessional staff to learn information technology needed for library operations. It is hereby suggested that paraprofessional staff should not just be employed but properly integrated into the library system through training and re-training.

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Appendix 1: In-Service Training and Staff Development

A survey is being conducted on in-service training and staff development. Kindly give your candid opinion about the issues raised in this questionnaire. Your answer will be treated confidentially.

Name: (Optional)

Institution:

Position held in the library:

Years of experience in library profession

Age: (a) 15 - 20yrs (b) 21 - 30yrs (c) 31 - 40yrs (d) 41 - 50yrs (e) 50yrs & above

1. How best could workers who have served the library for many years be rewarded?
2. What do you consider the best way to reward a dedicated staff?
 - a. Confirmation of appointment
 - b. Additional increment/rapid promotion
 - c. Yearly performance award
 - d. Study leave
 - e. Workshop and seminarsPlease tick only one.

3. How will you feel returning to school environment considering all your family commitments so far?
4. If a local technical college agrees to offer a course based on your work in the library, will you:
 - a. Enroll?
 - b. Meet every financial requirement?
 - c. Attend lectures when scheduled?
5. If the library subsidises this course, will you be able to attend? Yes or No
6. If yes, what days of the week and time ?
7. When the course in Diploma in Library science was introduced in University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria (a) did you participate? (b) If No, why?
8. If this opportunity comes up again how will you react to it
9. Have you taken part in in-service training of any sort
10. Suggest ways the enrolment to this programme could be enhanced.
11. Considering your particular environment in this institution, what do you think could motivate you to accept in-service training of any type?
12. Is it really necessary to reintroduce formal study and formal training to staff who have not engaged in formal studies for a long time?

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