



The Role of Information Technology in the Professional Development of Librarians and Adult Educators in Nigeria

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Abstract

*Professional Development (PD) is inevitable and a continuum for efficient and effective service delivery in all professionals including librarians and adult educators. It is on this backdrop that this paper seeks to explore the challenges facing Librarians and Adult Educators' professional development and examines the roles of ICTs and libraries for effective professional development and practice. The paper also presents the PD activities of the **National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)** of the United States. A brief history of professional development in the field Information Science is presented. Also Jesse H. Shera and Gerald Salton's educational models of information science curriculum are briefly highlighted. Based on the perceived underutilization of ICTs tools by Librarians and Adult educators, authors recommends several strategies for improvement which include that **National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)** be established in Nigeria by Adult Educators. Librarians and Adult Educators' curricula should be improved to reflect ICTs pedagogies.*

Keywords: Librarians, Adult educators, professional development, Information Science, ICTs.

1.0 Introduction

Professional development is an important vehicle to identify gaps in knowledge that can be addressed in future professional-development workshops. As with all initiatives involving educational strategies that are new to teachers, improved understanding among those expected to implement strategies requires well-planned professional learning workshops and adequate time for implementation to ensuring

success (Ferguson, 2006). Information science education began slowly in the 1950s and 1960s. Two educational models evolved over time and were followed for decades to come. They were pioneered by Shera and Salton. Both models have strengths and weaknesses. A third model is presently emerging, under the label of i-Schools. Adult Educators must understand the concepts in processing professional development and what it means to education. Montiel-Overall

& Hernández (2012) observed that in workplaces, **professional development** refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge, both for personal development and for career advancement. Professional Development (PD) encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees to formal coursework, conferences and informal learning opportunities situated in practice.

It is against this background that this paper tends to discuss the concept of professional development and the role information communication technologies play in the librarians' and educators professional development in Nigeria.

2.1 Literature Review

Writing about adult education curriculum, Ihejirika & Mbalisi (2014) believe that the curriculum of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria needs to be repositioned, redirected and re-engineered to make way for proper development and training of both would-be and working adult educators and practitioners. The reengineering of the curriculum is necessary to maximally equip adult educators and practitioners with appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, commitment and motivations required for effective and efficient design and implementation of problem-specific programmes. They further reiterated thus:

“There should be a mixture of methodology used in training future adult educators and practitioners. Unconventional methods such as excursion, field trips, case study, action projects, etc. should always be combined with conventional methods such as lecturing, discussion and so on. Efforts should be made to identify and collaborate with governmental and non-governmental agencies with adult education programmes in priority areas. Collaborating with these agencies will go a long way in changing the orientation of

lecturers, students, educators and practitioners towards adult education”.

This means that adult education should have a paradigm shift from traditional classroom teaching and learning to outreaches that involves the special groups of learners. It is obvious that adult educator should be involved in professional development activities from time to time. This study therefore aims to identify factors that inhibit full participation in PD activities and strategies for overcoming them. Information and Communication Technologies and Libraries have roles to play in order to make this a reality.

2.1 National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)

The **National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)** was incorporated in 1990 to fulfill a desire of state adult education staff to enhance their professional development. Organized by state directors of adult education, NAEPDC has five main purposes:

- i. To coordinate, develop, and conduct programs of professional development for state adult education staffs;
- ii. To serve as a catalyst for public policy review and development related to adult education;
- iii. To disseminate information on the field of adult education;
- iv. To maintain a visible presence for the state adult education program in our nation's capitol; and
- v. To coordinate the development of national and/or international adult education initiatives and link those initiatives to state programs.

Since its inception, the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC) has established itself

as a major force in the adult education community. More than 50 states in the US and territories are members. NAEPDC works with the Department of Education (Office of Vocational and Adult Education), the National Institute for Literacy, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, the National Center for Adult Literacy, the National Coalition for Literacy, and other national adult education organizations in planning for programs and activities to support adult learning initiatives.

The National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC) responds to the needs of its member states through a variety of activities, such as:

- i. Training activities geared to specific needs of state staff
- ii. Publications which provide promising practices and strategies for fostering effective state leadership;
- iii. A wealth of online resources to provide state policy and procedure models and options; and
- iv. Specialized services for new state directors to support their leadership and management skills. (NAEPDC, 2011).

2.2 Impact of Librarians and Libraries in Professional Development

The role of the librarian remains fundamentally unchanged. Bains (2013) noted that the consequences of the web have been enormous, and the pace of change shows little sign of slowing. But, fundamentally, librarians' role remains what it always has been - to support our institutions in the delivery of their research and learning strategies. This implies that what librarians need to do to achieve this, though, is radically different from what it was before the explosion in networked digital information. Recognition of this fact and readiness to adapt with paradigm shift will make librarians and the information professionals become more

relevant to their academic colleagues and students.

Libraries are becoming about supporting study, not storing books

The assumption that librarians might cease to require library buildings as we move towards digital collections has not been borne out. There is huge demand for space from students, but librarians are becoming people spaces instead of book spaces.

Librarians need to become effective marketers

In the past, there has been no need. We have been the gatekeepers of knowledge, and our users have had no choice but to engage with us. Now they do have a choice, they can access knowledge online, so we must engage more effectively than we have in the past. Having said that, I think librarians are effective strategists, and we are good at developing plans, services and business cases to position libraries in new ways. But we must think from the user's point of view, understand their needs, create services which are meaningful to them, and be effective in promoting them.

Similarly, there are several Library and Information Science Consortia that librarians in Nigeria are not fully utilizing professional development opportunities being offered. Librarians should, through their professional affiliations, (like Nigerian Library Association and Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria) acquaint themselves with professional skills that will enhance their professional practice.

2.3 Professional Development in the field of Information Science

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a movement to broaden and reorient information science education, spearheaded by a number of deans of schools with strong information science schools were renamed into Information Schools or i-schools. An

informal i-School Caucus was formed in 2005. By 2008, the Causes included over 20 schools quite diverse in origin. They include schools of: information; library and information science; information systems; informatics; public policy and management; information and computer sciences; and computing. The i-Schools are primarily interested in educational and research programmes addressing the relationship between information, technology, and people and understanding the role of information in human endeavours (Saracervic 2010).

While the i-School movement was originally restricted to the United States, some schools outside the United States are joining. The movement is attracting wide international interest. The i-Schools represent an innovative, new approach to information science education, with some true interdisciplinary connections. As the millennial decade draws toward an end, it is also signifying a new direction to information science education.

3.1 Strength and Weakness of Shera and Salton Educational Models

The strength of the Shera model is that it posits education within a service framework, connects the education to professional practice and a broader and user-oriented frame of a number of other information services, and relates it to a great diversity of information resources. The weakness is a lack of a broader theoretical framework, and a lack of teaching of formalism related to systems, such as the development and understanding of algorithms. A majority of researchers in the human information behaviour and user-centred approach are associated with this educational environment. Out of this was born the current and widely used designation *library and information science* (Saracervic 2010). The strength and weakness of Salton's Model are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Strength and Weakness of Salton's Model

| S/N | The Strength of Salton's model | The Weakness of Salton's model |
|-----|---|---|
| 1 | Starts from a base of a firm grounding in formal mathematical and other methods | Ignores the broader aspects of information science, as well as any other disciplines and approaches dealing with the human aspects, that have great relevance to both outcomes of Information Retrieval Research and research itself; and |
| 2 | Relates directly to research. | Does not incorporate professional practice where these systems are realized and used. It loses users. |

Source: Tabulation authors'

Consequently, this is successful, but narrowly concentrated education in IR as a specialty of computer science, rather than in information science. Not surprisingly, the researchers in the systems-centred approach came out of this tradition (Saracervic 2010).

3.2 The role of ICTs in Professional Development

The use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has expanded in the context of educational, documentation and library and information services employed by grassroots movements and village associations, even as market forces are exploiting them to transform education into a commodity. These same technologies have been put to work as tools for self-expression providing new opportunities for creative expression. They have also facilitated the free exchange of information, ideas and products through innovations such as open-source software, peer-to-peer sharing and even email, contributing to an affirmative culture of knowledge sharing and interactive learning (Hinzen, 2003). Writing about the importance of ICTs for training teachers, (Fal 2004) asserts that “information and communication technologies offer huge potential for the training of trainers, the rapid production of teaching materials and, above all, wide dissemination of knowledge, etc. In other words, both librarians and educators should owe it as an obligation to leverage the information technology tools in their professional development and services delivery within and outside their institutional/working environment.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Researchers in this review paper have identified adult education professional development challenges. They have also ascertained the role of ICTs for effective professional development programme for

both librarians and adult educators. Equally the role of libraries in professional development has been examined.

Adult education as a profession has to do with equipping adult learners and adult educators with worthwhile knowledge for better practice. It appears, however, that in Nigerian educational institutions adult educators are not adequately equipped with knowledge and skill to carry out their teaching function better. It also appears that Adult Educators are not fully and or frequently involved in professional development programmes. Compared to developed countries which have established consortium for the nation, such as the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC) of United States Nigeria is yet to come up with such establishment. Librarians and Adult Educators seem to be under utilizing ICTs tools to enhance their profession.

It is recommended that librarians and adult educators should always associate with their professional organizations through workshops and conference attendance in order to be more equipped for professional practice their educational, library and information science service delivery in Nigeria. Inasmuch as the base or core courses that students are taking rest in the traditional library and adult education curricula, teachers of both disciplines should rearticulate curricula to include modern trends (involving ICTs aspect of the disciplines. In other words there should be technologically based education for students; while workshop and conference themes for workers should include ICTs. This will ultimately enhance academic performance and professional practice.

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