

Challenges Encountered During Field Experience Exercise by Trainees (Students) of University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria: Management, Issues and Remedies

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Abstract

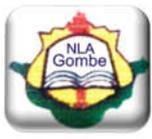
This paper determines the challenges encountered by trainees (students) of library and information science department of University of Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria. Library field experience is a practical training on various library routines and functions supervised by professionals in libraries. Having analyzed the data presented, the paper revealed the challenges faced by library and information science students participating in the library field experience scheme in the University of Maiduguri library. These include hostility of supervisors, poor supervision, and non-co-operative attitude of supervisors, among others. Thus, the paper recommends among others, that library staff should endeavor to direct, counsel, guard, cooperate, encourage and guide the trainee librarians appropriately during the field experience scheme in order to meet the need for establishment.

Keywords: Field Experience, Trainee students, Ramat Library, University of Maiduguri, Borno, Nigeria.

Introduction

There is no agreement on how to refer to the practical experiences that LIS programmes may offer, or on what these field experiences contain and omit. Practicum, internship, work-study, co-op, field experiences, and service learning are all terms that have been used to characterise various lengths, styles, and components of practical experiences that occur as part of LIS education. According to Berg, Hoffmann and Dawson (2009), when Melvil Dewey designed the curriculum for Columbia College's first library school, he combined classroom instruction with hands-on experience in libraries. Dewey stated in an 1884 prospectus that "lectures and reading alone will not produce the best results in training without the operation and practical work in a library".

Field experience is a practical industrial attachment in libraries for training of future librarians. Thus, a field based, supervised, professional learning experience that take place in a library setting. The essence of this field experience training is to let the students go through a variety of tasks and learning experiences in a range of library operations such as acquisition,



cataloguing, circulation, reference, special collection and the like. It provides students an opportunity to apply the theoretical learning in the classroom to world setting. Jorosi, (2001) stated that field experience is mandatory in every librarianship education program, whether certificate, diploma, first degree and postgraduate studies.

Bird, Chu and Oguz (2015) affirmed that internships play an important role in professional education by exposing students to professionals, their daily activities, and the problems of an institutional setting. Students that take advantage of these chances have a better grasp of their chosen profession and are able to better connect theory and practice.

Statement of the Problem

As part of the partial requirements for students to obtain their degree in Library and Information Science, students are required to undergo a mandatory field experience exercise for a period of six months as a core course in the third year of their studies. This enables students to relate theory to practical by working under appointed supervisors in various divisions of libraries. Essentially, field experience exercise seems to be all demanding (tasking), time, energy and money are required to carry out these task. Despite these enormous demands, trainees seem to face challenges in the course of the exercise. Some of the challenges face by the students among which are non-cooperative attitudes of the library staff, lack of adequate tools, missing of lectures for those carrying-over lower level courses and some elective courses, and the nonchalant attitude of the library staff to work. Other challenges were non-availability of new library resources to facilitate first-hand experience of managing such resources and sometimes over-crowding of trainee librarians at a particular library. In the light of the above, this study aimed at determining the challenges encountered during field experience exercise by trainees in Library.

Objectives of the Study

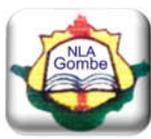
The objectives of this study were to;

1. Identify the challenges faced during field experience by trainees (students) in Ramat Library.
2. Proffer practical strategies for the effective implementation of the field experience program.

Literature Review

Library practicum is a period of helping the pre-services librarians to try out and make meaningful the principles learnt while in the college or university in a conventional library setting. During this exercise, the trainee librarians applies theories learnt in the classroom to practical library situations, under organized supervision (Adomi, 2002). This means that the library practicum provides opportunities for the trainee librarian to learning to work in libraries by working in actual library situations. Aina and Obokoh, (2003) reported that the prospective librarian gets something from experience in the library which may be difficult to put in textbooks, or communicate in lectures, and is not included in formal taught courses in library schools which Waller (1997) describes as “elusive” or “social insight”.

Almost every occupation attached great relevance to field experience. Librarianship is not exclusive. Thus, Dodge and Mckeough (2003) argue that education without practical application would not sufficiently equip a person to work effectively in a trade or profession. Karunaratne and Perera (2015) are of the view that field experience provides students with significant benefits in career progression and also strengthen their self-confidence and self-satisfaction in the lifelong learning process.



Nevertheless, while it is recognized that field experience is a viable avenue through which its students can gain value, competences and skills; Often times the program is loaded with challenges that tend to affect its effectiveness which Olabiyi, Okafor and Peter (2012) identified as absence of approved job specifications for the courses, shortness of the field experience period and unfriendliness of the workers toward trainees.

Methodology

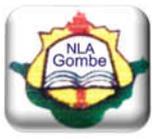
Survey research design was adopted for the study. Questionnaire was the instrument used for collecting data to establish the challenges encountered by trainees (students) while on field experience. The questionnaire was made up of two sections. Section A was meant to provide personal data, while section B contains structured items on challenges encountered by trainee librarians in the library studied. The population of the study was made up of all 300 level of under-graduated students of the department of Library and Information Science for the 2019/2020 academic session who were involved in the exercise. The entire population of the students were 368. The questionnaire distributed were 368 and 360 were all returned filled and valid. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage scores were used to analysed the data.

Table 1: Challenges Faced by Trainee Para-Professional Librarians during their Library Practicum Exercise

Items	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Non-cooperative attitudes between staff and students.	260(72.2%)	40(11.1%)	60(16.7%)
The library staff were hostile.	240(66.6%)	60(16.7%)	60(16.7%)
The library staff relegated the trainee librarians to the background because they were para-professionals.	200(55.6%)	80(22.2%)	80(22.2%)
Lack of training tools.	260(72.2%)	50(13.9%)	50(13.9%)
Lack of proper coordination/supervision.	280(77.8%)	20(5.55%)	60(16.7%)
Library staff treated them as cheap labor.	320(88.9%)	40(11.1%)	-
The undergraduate library science degree students who also did library practicum exercise were more respected than them.	340(94.4%)	10(2.8%)	10(2.8%)
Most of the library staff resumed late to work	340(94.4%)	10(2.8%)	10(2.8%)
Rigidness of training program	280(77.8%)	20(5.55%)	60(16.7%)
The trainee students missed their lectures during the exercise	320(88.9%)	30(8.3%)	10(2.8%)
Some trained students sneaked out of the library after being supervised	200(55.6%)	80(22.2%)	80(22.2%)
Coping with lectures during the exercise is very difficult	360(100%)		
In some sections of the library the trainees were not allowed to go on break.	200(55.6%)	80(22.2%)	80(22.2%)
The period of the library practicum exercise is not conducive.	300(83.3%)		60(16.7%)
Some supervisors were partial.	200(55.6%)	80(22.2%)	80(22.2%)
You were given wrong assessment by your supervisor.	260(72.2%)	50(13.9%)	50(13.9%)
You think yard-sticks for assessment were measured with the relationship of the trainee librarians and the extent of hospitality accorded to supervisors.	340(94.4%)	10(2.8%)	10(2.8%)

Discussion of Findings

The results of the findings indicated that all trainee para-professional librarians see the library practice as very necessary and interesting. Irrespective of how interesting the exercise is, the trainee librarians agree that there are many challenges in the exercise. The study revealed non-



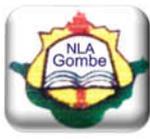
cooperative attitude of the library staff (72.2%), their hostility (66.6%), relegating the trainee librarians to the background (55.6%), lack of training tool (72.2%), addressing them rudely (77.8%), lack of proper coordination and supervision (88.9%), resuming late to work (94.4%) because they (the staff) believe the trainees will be there to attend to patrons and similarly showing preference to the undergraduate degree trainee librarians who also were on internship with them, even when they were better (94.4%). The students (88.9%) also complained of the library staff using them as cheap labor, and even after over working them (55.6%), they were not allowed to go on break during break hours. These complains are peculiar to some sections or departments where the students were posted to and not all the sections. The irony of it all is that some students highlighted on the questionnaire that they like what others call 'over work' as it gives them room for perfection and improvement. Adomi (2002:31) in an earlier study revealed that while in the library for the trainee students are expected to be under the tutelage of the library staff, it is required that they (the staff) assist them in understanding the workings of the library. Therefore, it is the students' rights to be put through by the library staff.

Furthermore, the study revealed that most students missed lectures during the exercise (88.9%) of them agreed to this. They (83.3%) also agreed that the period of the exercise is not conducive. All agreed that coping with lectures during this exercise is so stressful and gives no room for concentration. However, it was gathered that most lecturers teach the students between the hours of 7.00am to 8.00am and 4.00pm to 7.00pm. Some students may not even have lecturers on the day of their practicum because most of the courses offered at this time of the academic calendar are mainly elective courses. In some instances, various heads of departments refused the students permission to attend lectures, though some of the trainees used this as an excuse to sneak out of the library.

By and large, each trainee is allotted a particular day of the week for the exercise, that is, they officially go to the library for the practicum once in a week. The study further revealed that most of the trainees sneak out of the library as soon as the daily routine check has been conducted (55.6%), leaving a few dedicated ones to do the job. Unfortunately, their course mates cover up for them instead of reporting them to the appropriate quarters. Meanwhile, the research has also revealed that some of the trainee para-professionals have been known to be very disobedient to the field supervisors. The study further revealed that other students who come to the library would not want the trainees (77.8%) to attend to them because they know them to be students on practicum. Most of the supervisors (55.6%) were partial in their assessments using their relationship with the trainee librarians and the extent of hospitality (94.4%) shown to them. This in most cases becomes the yardstick for assessment.

Conclusion

Some of the challenges faced by the trainees are man-made and can be mitigated with proper educating of both the library staff and the trainees. Good interpersonal relationship will go a long creating an enabling environment for the trainee to gain the best experience out of the exercise and will bring up the best out of the librarianship profession. It may therefore be concluded that the library practicum exercise is an interesting, educative and challenging exercise for the trainee para-professional librarians. In other words, the library practicum exercise is important and inevitable for all trainee librarians irrespective of the challenges they may face at the field. The challenges only bring them into the realities of the profession, like the proverbial silver purified seven times.



Recommendations of the Study

In view of the findings revealed from results obtained from the study, the following recommendations have been established:

- 1- The library staff of the University of Maiduguri Library should endeavor to cooperate, encourage, direct, counsel, guard and guide the trainee librarians appropriately during the exercise. Proper orientation should be given to both staff and students on interpersonal issues, standards for assessment of trainees, professional and other ethical issues before the commencement of the exercise.
- 2- The school calendar should be adjusted to suit and accommodate the practicum exercise, so that trainees do not need to combine the exercise with lectures. Qualified, disciplined and sincere supervisors should be chosen for the exercise. Those with questionable characters must not be enlisted as supervisors. The staff should be strict on the trainees especially those found wanting and displaying some delinquent behaviors.

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