

STAFF DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARY ASSISTANT:
THE ABUBAKAR TAFAWA BALEWA
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

BY

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Abstract

The paper discussed the yearly Senior Library Assistants' course run by the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi, Nigeria. It gave the highlights of the course which includes duration, registration fees, syllabus and evaluation.

The responses from participants through questionnaires administered when the course was organized in 1991 and 1992 were analysed and relevant interpretation made. The overall assessment of the participants was that the course had given them a better understanding of Library and Information Science. They also proffered a number of suggestions to improve upon the course.

It concluded that libraries should invest in their human resources with the view to upgrading staff skills through education and training.

Introduction

The Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi was established in 1980 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Initially it was known as the Federal University of Technology, Bauchi. Then in October 1984, it lost its autonomy and was reduced in status to a mere campus of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. Consequently it was renamed Abubakar Tafawa Balewa College (ATBC).

The ATBC was again converted into a full fledged university in January, 1988 and became known as the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU). The ATBU conditions of service of staff (both junior and senior) have since October 1984 been modelled on those in the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) without taking into consideration the peculiar needs of a young university like the one in Bauchi. The ABU requires library assistants to have a minimum of three years satisfactory experience plus the Senior Library Assistants' Certificate before they may be considered for promotion. The Institute of Education, ABU runs the Senior Library Assistants' Course during the long vacation. Interested library assistants in ABU are able to attend this Course. But not so with their counterparts in ATBU.

Due to lack of funds junior staff in ATBU have since 1984 not enjoyed study leave with pay. And because of inadequate staff the ATBU Library could only allow one of its library assistants to pursue the Senior Library Assistants' course run by the Institute of Education, ABU. He acquired the Senior Library Assistants' Certificate in 1986 and thus became the first library assistant to be promoted to the senior library assistants grade in October 1988.

The Library was established in August 1981 but by October 1988 only one library assistant had been promoted to the senior library assistant grade. The library assistants have made positive contribution to the development of the library over the years. Naturally their almost total neglect in respect of promotion has affected their morale.¹

At the meeting of the Library Consultative Committee on June 6, 1990, it was decided that the library should organize a Senior Library Assistants' course to facilitate the promotion of deserving library assistants. As a result of this the University Librarian set up a committee, under the Chairmanship of the Deputy University Librarian, to draw up a suitable syllabus for the course. The committee completed its assignment in July, 1990. The

Committee's recommendations were subsequently discussed and approved by the Library Academic Board.

In August 1990, the Vice-Chancellor, acting on behalf of both the Library Committee and Senate, gave administrative approval for the Senior Library Assistants' course to be organized by the Library.

This write up describes the main features of the Senior Library Assistants' Course being run by the ATBU Library. It also discusses the experience gained after running the course for two consecutive years in 1991 and 1992 respectively. All the participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the course through a questionnaire which was administered on the last day of the course. The responses from the participants would also be incorporated in this discussion.

The course in 1991 lasted from March 3-24, and attracted 49 participants. In 1992, it was held from March 30-April 14, and was attended by 37 candidates to bring the cumulative total to 86. The analysis and interpretation of data from the questionnaire will therefore be based on the 86 participants covering the two year period.

Features of the Course

The course lasts for a period of three weeks. Lectures hold from Monday to Friday from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm with one hour break each day. Each lecture lasts one hour while a practical session lasts two hours.

Those eligible to attend the course are serving library assistants/attendants or candidates with the West African School Certificate (WASC) or its equivalent. The course fee is ₦500.00 per candidate while the cost of each application form is only ₦10.00. Candidates arrange for their own boarding and lodging. The method of instruction consists of lectures and practicals. The course is evaluated throughout the three week period and it involves attendance, assignments, practicals and examination. Certificates are issued to successful candidates at the end of the course. Certificate of participation is, however, issued to those who fail the entire course.

There are six compulsory subjects which the candidates must study while on the course. These are Library, Information and Society; Collection Development; Organisation of Knowledge; Readers Service; Preservation of Library Materials; and Library Administration.

The lecturers who teach these subjects are academic staff of the library ranging from the University Librarian to Librarian II.

Publicity:

Due publicity was given to ensure that interested candidates became aware of the course so that they could plan and enrol for it. A number of methods were employed in this regard. Three months to the date of commencement of the course circulars, giving the main highlights of the course were sent to all university, polytechnic, college of education and state libraries in the country. Similarly, libraries of some research institutes, ministries, parastatals and other organizations were duly sent the above circulars.

One newspaper advert was placed in the *New Nigerian* in January, 1991 and another one in *Daily Times* in February 1992 to ensure that interested members of the public became aware of the course. We were interested in ensuring that libraries and library assistants in Bauchi State also benefited from this course. We therefore placed a series of advertisements on the course in the local media: Nigerian Television Authority; Bauchi State Television; and Bauchi Radio Corporation respectively.

From Table 1 it is obvious that the sending of circulars to libraries to intimate them about the course was the most effective means of publicity. This accounted for 48.19% and was followed by newspaper advertisement which represented 34.94%.

Publicity accounted for 75.63% of the entire overhead costs in running the course which stood at ₦11,421.00. The advertisements on Radio and Television which were intended solely for the residents of Bauchi State did not attract many participants as expected. They could be dropped and the savings made as a result could be used to increase the newspaper advertisement from one to two. Advertisement in the print media is more effective because of its national coverage.

Demographic Composition

In all 69.76% of the participants were males while 30.24% were females. This is another confirmation that the library profession in Nigeria is dominated by males.²⁻⁴

The course has enjoyed a national patronage. There are 30 states in the country in addition to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Within the two year period that the course has been offered it was able to attract participants from 19 states which is 61.29% coverage. This is thus a justification for the huge expenditure in publicising the course nationwide in selected national newspapers and through circulars.

Sponsorship

A majority of the candidates (62.79%) were sponsored by their employers while a significant proportion (37.21%) sponsored themselves. Information about the course should reach prospective candidates at least six months to its commencement. This will particularly assist the self-sponsored candidates save towards it. Even for the sponsored candidates this will help them because of red tapeism it takes a considerable length of time to get money from most organisations especially government ministries and parastatals.

The candidates came from almost all types of libraries. This contributed to the quality of discussions during lectures and practicals. They were encouraged to share their library experiences and practices for the benefit of the entire group. Candidates from special libraries topped the list. They constituted 44.20% of the group. It appears special libraries in Nigeria are comparatively well funded and can thus afford to sponsor candidates for such a course. Two notable organizations which sponsored candidates for this course were the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation and the Central Bank of Nigeria. Library assistants from the ATBU Library were 18 out of the 26 from academic libraries. This was to be expected since the primary reason for mounting the course was to enable them acquire the Senior Library Assistants' Certificate so as to facilitate their promotion which was long overdue. Only 2 out of the remaining 6 from academic libraries came from other university libraries. This is basically due to the fact that a considerable number of the university libraries in Nigeria run similar courses. Some of these libraries are those in Ahmadu Bello University, University of Jos, University of Lagos and University of Port-Harcourt.

Reasons for Participation

The questionnaire sought to know from the candidates why they chose to participate in the course. They gave a variety of reasons for this. The major reasons they gave included the following: to acquire more knowledge in librarianship so as to equip them to perform their duties efficiently and effectively; to facilitate their promotion; to enable them to pursue higher courses in librarianship; to obtain additional qualification and certificate; and because they were nominated by their employers.

The above reasons are basically in consonance with the objectives of the course. These are:

- (i) "to provide library assistants with basic theoretical training in the skills and techniques of library and information science;
- (ii) to provide library assistants with practical training in library routines so that they can perform non-professional library duties more effectively;
- (iii) to serve as a means of promotion from the rank of library assistant to senior library assistant; and
- (iv) to serve as a means of enhancing opportunity for entry into the Assistant Library Officer's Course"⁵.

Comments on the Course:

A majority of the candidates thought that the course was relevant to their job. This positive view might have motivated them to be serious with their lectures, practicals and assignments while the course lasted.

The candidates were then asked to indicate whether the lectures were either technical or were brought to their level. In respect of this questions, 62.7% of them stated that the lectures were within their level of understanding while 37.3% held a contrary view.

The two subjects considered too technical or difficult to understand were Organization of Knowledge and Library Administration. The former incorporates both Classification and Cataloguing which are by nature technical. It is therefore not surprising that the candidates also considered it technical. Library Administration is a vital component of the course. This is because many school libraries and ministry libraries in Nigeria are manned by library assistants. They therefore need the basics of administration to enable them manage such libraries effectively. The two sets of candidates both rated these two subjects difficult. It is suggested that during subsequent courses extra tutorials should be given on these two subjects.

84.2% of the candidates reported that assignments given to them while on the course were not too many while 15.8% thought otherwise. Each lecturer was required to give at least one theory and one practical assignment. These formed part of the continuous assessment. The assignments given to the candidates enabled the lecturers assess their level of understanding of the topics as they were being taught. These should continue to form part of the course.

The course has two components: theory; and practicals. The former constitutes 75% of available time while practicals take the remaining 25%. On this, 68.3% of the candidates preferred more practicals while the remaining 31.7% held the view that there was no need to increase the time allotted for practicals. The course is primarily meant for serving library assistants who need to understand the reasons behind library procedures. They need more theory rather than practicals. After they might have passed through the course they could go to their respective libraries and relate theory to practicals.

Most of the candidates complained that the duration of the course was too short. In fact 82.1% of them held this view. Most of them suggested that the course should last for eight weeks. There are several factors to take into consideration in fixing the duration of a course. The major ones are the content of the syllabus and the registration fee. The course was held in the first semester break on each of the two occasions it was offered. The first semester break usually lasts only three weeks. It is against the University policy for departments to organize courses for non students when academic work is in progress. This is understandable as one of the primary responsibilities of the University is to teach students to earn their degrees and certificates. The Library being the bibliographical centre of the University has a major responsibility here.

The Library Academic Board has, however, taken the above suggestion on the possible review of the duration of the course seriously. It has therefore decided that it should last for four weeks and it should hold during the long vacation in August. The next course will therefore take place in August, 1993. The registration fee will also be revised upwards.

The candidates were given the opportunity to offer suggestions that may help improve the content and teaching of the course. They suggested the following: candidates should be given hand outs; the time table is crowded; the library should also introduce diploma course in librarianship; assistance should be given to candidates to secure accommodation.

The Library has made it a policy not to give the candidates handouts. Instead it gave out reading lists to each of the candidates as part of the course materials which also included the brochure on the course, a file and plain sheets of paper for their assignments. This is to enable the library assistants use a variety of information sources to get broad education. They will likely cram the notes in the hand outs if they were given these.

Several universities and polytechnics in the country offer diploma courses in Librarianship. Candidates were therefore advised to avail themselves of this because the library does not have adequate manpower to run such a course. The University does not let out students hostel to outsiders during the first semester break. But now that the course will be held in August this will make it possible for candidates to get student accommodation at minimal extra cost to them. This will help alleviate the accommodation problem of candidates who are not resident in Bauchi.

The overall assessment by the candidates was very positive. In all 97.50% of them recorded that the course has given them a better understanding of basic theory and practice in Library and Information Science. The credit here goes to the Library that provided the facilities for the course; the resource persons who were the teachers and facilitators and lastly but not the least, the participants who enthusiastically took their studies seriously.

Examination Result

The minimum pass mark in a subject is 40%. A candidate is deemed to have passed the Course if he passes in a minimum of four subjects and has an overall average score of not less than 40%.

The success rate so far stands at 87.21%. In order works 75 out of 86 passed and were issued with certificates. Those who failed the course (that is 11 out of 86) only qualified for certificate of participation. Analysis of the background of the 11 who failed the course revealed that this number included all the 3 candidates with only the Primary School Certificate (Table III). Even though the latter had library experience ranging from thirteen to fifteen years, 2 of them failed in all the six subjects while the remaining one could manage to pass in just one subject. The main reason for their failure was that they could hardly express themselves in English both orally and in writing.

Out of the 12 participants with WASC/TC II but no library experience the records indicated that 10 (i.e. 83.33%) of the lot passed the course. This confirms that candidates with good educational background are more likely to benefit from such a course. The Library Academic Board has in fact decided that library assistants with only primary school leaving certificate should no more be admitted into the course.

The Library has instituted a book prize for the overall best graduating student each year. This is made known to all the candidates during the first day of the course so as to encourage each of them to aim

at securing the prize. Each of the two previous winners secured an overall grade of 'A'. The book prize is publicly given during the graduation day.

The graduation day was fixed at the last day of the course. The successful candidates signed for and collected their certificates on that day. Those who also failed got their certificates of participation. Especially for the sponsored candidates, these certificates would convince their respective employers that they actually attended the course.

Conclusion

We have discussed at length a formal training programme for library assistants by an academic library. As rightly observed by Jones and Jordan "managers and supervisors who want to be effective staff developers need to pay more attention to their staff's future prospects, as well as their immediate training needs".⁶ Regrettably, however, there is the relative neglect of non-professional staff development in academic libraries. Elliot⁷ and Russel⁸ have reported that even in academic libraries in Britain, clerical staff too are suffering from stagnation; and that they may be increasingly frustrated when they see professional staff benefiting in staff development programmes.

Libraries and information centres are dynamic institutions. To be able to cope with the major and rapid changes in information provision and management, librarians (especially at the management level) should realize that "human resources are too valuable for any institution to fail to invest in the training programmes needed for upgrading staff".⁹ While institutions have a responsibility to assist their staff to reach their full potential through education, training and development, employees should ultimately take keen interest in their own development.

The Library is also interested in finding out how the graduates are translating the knowledge they acquired while they were on the course in their various libraries. It therefore intends to send copies of a questionnaire to their respective employers to enable them send feedback to the Library. The responses from the employers will obviously assist the Library in planning and organizing subsequent Courses.

Table 1 Source of Publicity

Medium	No	% Age
Circular	40	48.19
Newspaper Advert	29	34.94
Radio	5	6.03
Television	5	6.03
Others	4	4.81
Total *	83	100.00

* 3 Candidates did not respond

Table II Participants by State

State	No	%
Abia	1	1.16
Abuja	7	8.14
Adamawa	2	2.33
Bauchi	43	50.00
Bornu	1	1.16
Cross River	1	1.16
Edo	2	2.33
Delta	1	1.16
Enugu	2	2.33
Gongola	2	2.33
Imo	1	1.16
Jigawa	1	1.16
Kaduna	2	2.33
Kano	2	2.33
Lagos	13	15.11
Niger	1	1.16
Oyo	2	2.33
Plateau	1	1.16
Yola	1	1.16
Total	86	100.00

Table III. Participation By Type of Libraries

Type	No	% Age
Special	38	44.20
Academic	26	30.20
Public	5	5.80
School	5	5.80
None of the above	12	14.00
Total	86	100.00

Table IV. Qualifications of Participants

Category	No	% Age
T.C. II	19	22.1
WASC/GCE	63	73.3
Primary Sch.		
Certificate	3	3.4
Diploma	1	1.2
Total	86	100.00

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