Students' Perceived Areas of Difficulty during Library Practicum in Nigerian University Libraries

Joseph Chukwusa
Delta State University Library
Abraka, Nigeria
chukwusajoseph@yahoo.com

Abstract

Rationale of Study – The practicum scheme is a scheduled, run, and evaluated programme. The programme provides opportunity for students to incorporate and apply classroom learning in library and information science in the workplace environment thereby enabling them to learn from experts. The study investigated students' perceived areas of difficulty during library practicum in Delta State and Prof. Aghagbo Nwako university libraries in Nigeria. It investigated students' areas of learning difficulties during library practicum; teaching difficulties encountered by library supervisors during library practicum; and the relationship between the students' and supervisors' learning and teaching difficulties during library practicum.

Methodology – This was a descriptive research using a questionnaire for data gathering. The population of the study consisted of all 154 final year students (2017/2018 session) of the Department of Library and Information Science in the two universities studied. The population also included 30 supervisors of the practicum. Data was analysed through descriptive statistics.

Findings – The study revealed that the use of classification schemes, filing of catalogue cards, indexing and abstracting of materials, descriptive cataloguing and use of computers were the areas of learning and teaching difficulties experienced by the students and supervisors. Suggestions were made and it was concluded that library authorities should see to it that teaching materials are made available to the students on practicum because the exercise is undertaken just once in the students' academic life time before proceeding to the world of work.

Implications – The findings of this study may be useful for identifying the different learning and teaching difficulties of students and industry-based supervisors with a view to proffering solutions to the identified lapses.

Originality – This is an original and empirical study on library practicum in two universities in Nigeria.

Keywords

Library practicum, library internship, practical training, Students' Work Experience Scheme SIWES

Introduction

The industrial training scheme occupies an important place in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum because it is the bridge that enables classroom concepts to mix with industry-based practice. Arakaki and De La Vega (2011) citing World Declaration of Higher Education in the 21st Century (1998) indicated that nations are known by their novel production standards and knowledge application. Therefore, the associations between tertiary education, the work world and other sections of society must be supported and transformed. This is where the practicum comes in as the linkage between the theoretical world and the world of work.

Considering quality and the need to bridge the gap between theory and practical training, students of library and information studies in Nigeria are exposed to a period of compulsory supervised industrial training in relevant institutions. This is done under the programme called Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). SIWES, through its orientation, enables students to be exposed to actual work methods in the industry where they acquire experience and skills in handling equipment that may not be available in school workshops and laboratories (Industrial Training Fund, 2008; Multnomah County Library, 2012).

Practical training has long been accepted as a necessity in the training of would-be librarians. Even though its effectiveness as a training framework has not been established, recent emphasis on skill acquisition seems to lend credence to its desirability (Ijaiya, 1996). Training institutions have high expectations from library practicum. It provides opportunity for evaluating student performance and teacher training apparatus (Eyo, 2013). Edmonton Public Library (2019) put forward the following as aims of a practicum:

- enable students to train and cultivate leadership abilities and opportunities that will assist them in their chosen career;
- get awareness and understanding of the philosophy and standards of the organisation through socialization and improvement in information delivery abilities;
- make interns to be aware of how organisations, both local and at a system-wide level, are run;
- obtain hands-on knowledge in transferring classroom book learning to place of work responsibilities as well as assignments; and

- serves as a provisional trial template for students' first professional outing in the work world.

The practicum provides an opportunity for students to create, mix, and relate practical skills, understanding, as well as education obtained through theoretical courses. It enables the students to have specialised knowledge in a professional work atmosphere before proceeding to their professional calling. Notwithstanding its significance, a small number of works about library practicums have been published in Nigeria when compared with other subjects on vocational education.

Literature Review

The practicum scheme is a scheduled, run, and evaluated programme. The programme provides opportunity for students to incorporate and apply classroom learning in library and information science in the workplace environment thereby enabling them to learn from experts. The students contribute to resources and service delivery while developing practical skills. The practicum serves as initial vital stage in library and information science profession by introducing the students to real-world talents and know-how vital for a rewarding vocation (Strong, 2017).

The goals of the practicum regularly mirror the overall aims of the university and the educational course offerings**.** In the course of the practicum, students work under the supervision of industry-based supervisors and the practicum director. The practicum is a temporary supervised work experience presented as an aspect of the required course of study and done during an academic programme (Arakaki & De La Vega, 2011; Coleman, 1989). The students are given the opportunity to explore and apply skills acquired from the professional world. Occasionally, it is the only first chance of mixing with employees in the workplace and a guide for the students to plan their future vocation (Ball, 2008). Controlled by industry-based supervisors, the practicum gives the student the opportunity to make theory and practice clearer; distinguish facts from errors in particular ways of doing things and make sense of several bits of information proffered by course topic (Ameen, 1992).

It is not only students who benefit from the practicum; other critical factors in the academic environment such as researchers also benefit. In universities as noted by Arakaki & De La Vega (2011), the practicum could open new areas of study, reposition the curriculum as well as enhance the flow of information between the general public and the institutions of higher education. Concerning lecturers, the practicum may help them to cultivate a professional relationship with students, update knowledge

in their subject area, and create networks with their associates. For the industry, the practicum provides the opportunity to identify new human capital in addition to positively enhancing their corporate image. It is necessary that the practicum is offered a prominent part in the curriculum planning (Larsen, 2005). Students have assessed the value of practicum with many studies indicating a high positive assessment (Arakaki & De La Vega, 2011; Larsen, 2005; Malik & Ameen, 2010).

No society can achieve meaningful progress without encouraging its youth to acquire practical skills. Such skills enable them to harness available resources to meet the needs of society (Ugwuanyi & Ezema, 2010). In Nigeria, students that participate in SIWES programmes include those studying library science, engineering as well as vocational, technological and related courses in institutions of higher learning. Library practicum is a core academic requirement carrying four credit units. This requirement must be met by all students in library and information science before graduation. It is also compulsory at National Diploma (ND) level and is scheduled in the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) curriculum. The training programme is undertaken in the third year of a four-year programme.

Subsequent upon the World Bank's statement that the Nigerian economy is not doing well as a result of the nation's failure to put in more effort in human capital development, the Administrator of Digital Bridge Institute (DBI), Ike Adinde, made a wakeup call for the country to start developing skills that meet the needs of modern nations (Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2019). This is because a lot of young Nigerians are not in employment not because they do not have the certificates but because they lack the required employability skills required. That is why DBI has embraced the plan to be at the forefront of the National Vocational Skills scheme. Skills development is not about certificate alone but about what one can do. The required skills should be developed so that the citizens can be independent. There is the need to make a distinction between unemployment as a result of jobs not being available and not being in employment as a result of not having the employable skills that the industries require (Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2019).

Practicum gives the would-be librarians an opportunity to test themselves in the world of work (Wambugu, 2010). Library practicum provides an opportunity to experience professional competencies in a real context as well as to evaluate their attainment (Igbinosa, 2007). Given the Federal Government of Nigeria's commitment to ensuring cost-effective

recovery and development, the provision of a hands-on educational programme through practicum to young people in their fields of work cannot be overstressed. However, the Director-General (DG), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Mr. Joseph Ari, was quoted as saying that challenges hampering the effective implementation of SIWES have unfavourably affected the purpose (Alade, 2019; Onuba, 2017 & Saanyol,   2017). Some of these include inadequate financing and an upsurge in students' enrolment stimulated by the continuous expansion of the number of tertiary educational institutions. Other challenges are growth in the number of approved courses, inadequate placement opportunities in industries, regulatory agencies not submitting placement lists early enough and mistaken notion about SIWES allowance to interns. According to Onuba (2017), these have made ITF to reduce the overhead costs involved in running the scheme to make more money available for the payment of students' allowances.

Furthermore, Ukwueze (2011) conducted a qualitative study y to explore the expectations of the students and learning outcomes of the practicum. The results of the study indicated that there was lack of congruence between students' pre-practicum expectations and post practicum outcomes. Education without

practical application would not sufficiently equip a person to work effectively in a trade or profession (Raravi, 2016). There has been a general agreement that professional education must be based on theory and practice. Becoming a librarian is not appropriate without hands-on experience. There is much discussion about how and to which extent practical training should be included in library and information programmes. Okorafor (2006), in her study on the use of library catalogues as access points to academic library collections, noted that an experiential learning programme is perceived not only as highly valuable to students but also as more prized to them than classroom-based coursework.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to obtain information in Nigerian setting concerning the learning difficulties that students on library practicum experience during the period of their internship in the university libraries. Specifically, the objectives are to investigate:

1. Students' areas of learning difficulties during library practicum;

2. Teaching difficulties encountered by library supervisors during library practicum; and

3. The relationship between the students' and supervisors' learning and teaching difficulties during library practicum.

The following research questions were posed as the basis of the study:

1. What are the students' areas of learning difficulties during library practicum?
2. What are the supervisors' areas of teaching difficulties during library practicum?
3. What is the relationship between students' perceived areas of learning difficulties and teaching difficulties experienced by supervisors?

The population of the study consisted of 154 final year students (2017/2018 session) of the Department of Library and Information Science of the two universities studied. All the students were used in the study while fifteen (15) industry-based supervisors (librarians) from each of the libraries were selected using quota sampling method. This ensured uniform representation of the industry-based supervisors in the libraries studied. All the professional librarians in the libraries studied served as the industry-based supervisors. Prof Festus Aghagbo Nwako University Library, Awka had 19 of them, while Delta State University Library, Abraka had 26. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics.

The instrument required the interns to rate their opinion on a four-point Likert scale of (4 = very difficult, 3 difficult, 2 neutral, 1 least difficult) on the level of difficulty they encountered in each of the fifteen areas of concern. Industry-based supervisors rated each of the difficulties according to the level of the students they supervised, also on the same Likert scale.

Data Analysis

All the 154 questionnaires administered to the respondents were retrieved and found usable. Also, the 30 questionnaires administered to the supervisors were retrieved and used for the study. The high return rate may be as a result of the involvement of the supervisors in the administration of the questionnaires.

Table 1: Learning Difficulties

S/N	Learning Difficulties	4	3	2	1	$\bar{x}$
1	Introduction/Orientation of Students	27	9	25	93	1.79
2	Collection Development Activities	15	35	-	104	1.75
3	Descriptive Cataloguing	3	74	6	71	2.06
4	Familiarisation with classification scheme(s)	9	27	6	112	1.56
5	Use of Classification Schemes	20	123	-	11	2.99
6	Filing of Catalogue Cards	56	50	28	20	2.92
7	Use of Computer where applicable	32	22	-	100	1.91
8	Charging and discharging of library materials	28	23	15	88	1.94
9	Keeping library use statistics	49	64	-	41	2.79
10	Serials management	12	3	41	98	1.54
11	Reference and information services	3	25	-	126	1.38
12	Shelving and shelf-reading	17	34	13	90	1.86
13	Indexing and abstracting of materials	29	88	24	13	2.86

14	Compilation of book lists and bibliographies	16	20	-	118	1.57
15	Bibliographic Searching	20	109	-	25	2.81

The mean cut-off point of 2.00 is considered acceptable as students' area of difficulty. Table 1 revealed that out of the fifteen measures of difficulties enumerated, six were accepted. These are use of classification schemes with a mean of 2.99, filing of catalogue cards (2.92), indexing and abstracting of materials (2.86), bibliographic searching (2.81), keeping library statistics (2.79), and descriptive cataloguing (2.06).

The students claimed to have moderate problems in charging and discharging of materials (1.94), use of computers where applicable (1.91), shelving and shelf-reading (1.86), introduction/orientation (1.29) and in collection development activities (1.75). The students further indicated that they have the least problem in familiarisation with classification schemes (1.56), serials management (1.54), computation of book lists and bibliographies (1.57), and reference and information services (1.38).

Table 2: Teaching Difficulties

S/N	Teaching difficulties	4	3	2	1	$\bar{x}$
1	Introduction/Orientation of Students	-	4	-	26	1.27
2	Collection Development Activities	3	6	-	21	1.70
3	Descriptive Cataloguing	4	18	-	8	2.60
4	Familiarity with classification schemes	-	5	3	22	1.43
5	Use of Classification Scheme	15	5	-	10	2.83
6	Filing of Catalogue Cards	2	18	-	10	3.00
7	Use of Computer where applicable	-	16	2	12	2.13
8	Charging and discharging of library materials					
9	Keeping library use statistics	-	6	-	24	1.40
10	Serials management	1	3	-	26	1.30
11	Reference and information services	3	8	-	19	1.83
12	Shelving and shelf-reading	-	3	-	27	1.20
13	Indexing and abstracting of materials	-	17	-	23	2.47
14	Compilation of book lists and bibliographies	2	3	-	25	1.40
15	Bibliographic Searching	-	27		3	2.80

Table 2 shows that out of the fifteen measures of teaching difficulties claimed by industry-based supervisors, six of the measures were accepted. This represents 40% of the measures. They are filing of catalogue cards with a mean of 3, use of classification scheme (2.83), bibliographic searching (2.80), descriptive cataloguing (2.60), indexing and abstracting of materials (2.47), and use of computers where applicable (2.13). The supervisors viewed collection development activities (1.70) and reference and information services (1.83) as moderate challenges. Teaching difficulties associated with shelving and shelf reading were recorded by the supervisors as "a no problem" (1.20).

Table 3: Means, ranks and ranks difference of how supervisors and students (interns) viewed instructional difficulties

S/N	Items	Supervisor N = 30		Students (interns) N = 154			
		$\bar{x}$	Rank	$\bar{x}$	Rank	d = x-y	d^2
1	Introduction/ Orientation of Students	1.27	13	1.79	10	3	9
2	Collection Development Activities	1.70	8	1.75	11	-3	9
3	Descriptive Cataloguing	2.60	4	2.06	6	-2	4
4	Familiarity with classification schemes	1.43	-9	1.56	13	-4	16
5	Use of Classification Scheme	2.83	2	2.99	1	1	1
6	Filing of Catalogue Cards	3	1	2.92	2	1	1
7	Use of Computer where applicable	2.13	6	1.91	8	-2	4
8	Charging and discharging of library materials	1.40	10	1.94	7	3	9
9	Keeping library use statistics	1.30	11	2.79	5	6	36
10	Serials management	1.27	12	1.54	14	-2	4
11	Reference and information services	1.83	7	1.38	15	-8	64
12	Shelving and shelf-reading	1.20	14	1.86	9	5	25
13	Indexing and abstracting of materials	2.47	5	2.86	3	2	4
14	Compilation of book lists and bibliographies	1.40	10	1.57	12	-2	4
15	Bibliographic Searching	2.80	3	2.81	4	-1	1
	Total						**191**

Table 3 presents the ranking of instructional difficulties as perceived by the industry-based supervisors (librarians and students on library practicum. Partial agreement were found in the "use of classification schemes", filing of catalogue cards" and 'bibliographic searching" which are items number 5, 6 and 15 respectively. Other items that were closely related in rank are: item 3, 7, 10, 13 and 14. There were disparities in the ranking of the other seven (7) items listed though with varying degree.

The rank order correlation coefficient indicates a high consensus (0.66) between the ranking of the industry-based supervisors and that of the interns. There is a relationship between students' perceived areas of learning difficulties and teaching difficulties.

Discussion of findings

The study revealed that use of classification schemes, filing of catalogue cards, indexing and abstracting of materials, bibliographic searching, keeping library statistics, and

descriptive cataloguing were areas of learning and teaching difficulties. There is dearth of literature on this subject. However, the little that was found is here used for discussion.

Title catalogues are helpful to those library readers who are more likely to remember the title of a publication than its author. Several library patrons, the interns included, use the title catalogue as a kind of subject catalogue. They are correct in supposing that a number of titles conform to the term they are considering (Rajinder, Joqinder, Balwan & Rana, 1991). The challenge with title catalogues is that interns frequently do not recall a title appropriately. Library interns frequently recall only the keywords of a title but not the correct and complete one. Also, the problem of differentiating between word-by-word and letter-by-letter methods of filing is another difficult area which the interns find troublesome (McGurr & Damasco, 2009).

The catalogue makes available numerous access points to the library's collection. These aims and features notwithstanding, the use of the catalogue is poor in most Nigerian university libraries (Okorafor, 2006). Inadequate use of catalogues in libraries was also noted by Okorafor who attributed this shortcoming to inadequate user education programmes and inadequate understanding of the rationale behind cataloguing and classification processes.

Most interns find the university library intimidating because they do not have adequate library skills. The likely solution to this problem could be making the use of the library compulsory in the library schools.

Several problems exist in teaching cataloguing and classification of library resources (Rajinder, Joqinder, Balwan & Rana, 1991). Such problems included use of old-fashioned cataloguing and classification tools as well as inadequate comprehension of cataloguing and classification rules. These resulted in poor interpretation and application of these rules by students on practicum. This research recommends possible solutions to the identified problems with a view to eradicating the cataloguing and classification challenges. Procurement of current subject indexes and classification schedules will go a long way in enhancing the understanding of cataloguing and classification rules. Also, giving students assignment and requiring them to use the library prior to practicum could also acquaint them with library skills. According to Ugwuanyi and Ezema (2009), other solutions include allocation of more teaching and practical time to cataloguing and classification, recruiting of cataloguing-oriented personnel as industry-based supervisors, purchasing of up-to-date National Union Catalogues (NUCs) and other necessary tools required for effective teaching and learning, among other things.

The rank order correlation coefficient indicates a high consensus (0.66) between the ranking of the industry-based supervisors and that of the interns. The main roles of the supervisors is to make certain that learning aims of the interns and programme objectives for the library are met and that all that are required in terms of reporting (both for the interns and the supervisors) is done (Multnomah County Library, 2012). This shows that both the supervisors and practicum students have more difficulties in teaching-learning amongst the items listed as problem areas. This finding differed from Ijaiya (1996) since the current researcher found out that there is a wide gap between what interns considered as their instructional problems and what the college supervisors felt. This is because Ijaiya (1996) used different measures and setting in arriving at her conclusion.

Research Implication

It is worthy of note to state here that the author was unable to find literature here in Nigeria or abroad that has the same bearing with the title of this work. The findings of this study are timely in identifying the different learning and teaching difficulties of students and industry-based supervisors with a view to proffering solutions to the identified lapses especially in developing countries. This will enhance the employability of the interns.

Conclusions

There was a relationship between the students' perceived areas of learning difficulties and teaching difficulties experienced by students and industry-based supervisors respectively. Therefore, university authorities should see to it that tools for cataloguing are adequate and made readily available to the practicum students because the exercise occurs once in the students' academic life before they proceed to the world of work. Both supervisors and students on library practicum must take the exercise seriously to make the exercise worthwhile.

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