The Role of Nigerian Library Association in Continuous Development of Librarians in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

*This paper reviews The Role of NLA in the Continuous Development of Librarians in Nigeria with specific focus on librarian and information profession. NLA has been in the forefront of the development of library profession in Nigeria. The objectives of NLA Includes; To unite persons interested in Libraries, Librarianship and Information services; To safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians; To promote the establishment and development of libraries and information centre; The paper highlighted the factors that have promoted discussions of continuous professional development for librarianship which includes; the vast growth of new knowledge; introduction of new technology in libraries and an increasing highly educated populace. The paper also explained the thirteen special interest groups of the NLA currently in existence such as; Academics and Research Libraries (ARL) Association of Government Libraries (AGOL); Association of News Media Librarians of Nigeria (ANLON) to mention but a few. The paper explains the professional development as a lifelong learning and is indispensable for professional growth and instrumental for sustaining one’s competence. The library can also become more productive with new skills and knowledge acquired through professional development programmes. The paper further highlighted the various professional development programs put in place by librarians such as seminars, workshops, conferences, mentorship, courses, and distance learning programs with interactive capabilities. The paper discusses the importance of continuous development programs which includes to update knowledge and skills in existing and new areas of practice, keep professional qualifications up-to-date, raise one’s profile through certifications and networking, making oneself more marketable to future employers and obtain new improved skills-making challenging tasks easier. The paper highlighted the problems associated with attending professional development program which includes; lack of interest, unacceptance of submitted papers and lack of awareness.*

*Key words: Professional association, continuous development, NLA, librarian, information professionals and professional development*

INTRODUCTION

The field of librarianship is ever expanding and changing, from exploding Internet and media technologies, to ever diverse patron groups with increasingly complex information needs keeping up with the today’s constant change and innovation is a challenging task, but one must undertake it to remain relevant in the emerging new work environment. Library professionals need to be as savvy as the clients they serve, and the most productive and effective way for librarians to keep up with these changes is to seek out professional development opportunities.

Due to the huge increase of knowledge, the emergence of modern technology and the changes in trends in libraries services, libraries are needed to accomplish more, and the skills library professionals require continue to change. This challenge has been exacerbated by the closing of several library schools in South Africa in recent years, putting further strain on continuous development of librarians in libraries which will assist libraries in overcoming the gaps in information skills in an online environment. (Victoria & Ugwunna, 2014)

**Continuous Development of Librarians**

Continuous development programs are one component of every organization's human resource management procedures. Continuous development for the professionals is unending procedure whereby people refresh their information, skills, and attitudes gained during their schooling. Continuous development programs of librarians aim to improve employees' knowledge, qualifications, and efficiency in order to make them more proficient in their work performance. It is also a lifetime learning process that allows one to broaden one's profession and competency helps to satisfy the current and future of patrons needs which offers better service outcomes and priorities. It ensures that a person has necessary levels of knowledge and competencies that helps in increasing professional area of practice. (Holley, 2013)

Ohnstone (2019) defines Continuous Professional Development for librarians in America is provided through the American Library Association ([www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)). Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is concerned by making sure that each person should have a chance to be able to stay current with emerging developments and to continually acquire and upgrade his or her competencies in their professional experience (Horvat, 2014)

Continuous professional development are in form of programs such as orientation programs, on-the-job training, the possibility to take part in conferences/ seminars /workshops/ to organize for advancement exercises, research and publications, networks and membership in library associations, study leaves, job rotation assignments, , and so on have all been implemented in Ghanaian university libraries. Examples of activities include training courses, professional reading, work exchanges and mentoring.

**Professional Development**

Professional development is no longer an option, it is a requirement of professional competency and practice, and hence it must be the top of every professional to do list. It is evident therefore that professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees to formal coursework, conferences and informal learning opportunities situated in practice. It has been described as intensive and collaborative, ideally incorporating an evaluative stage. There are a variety of approaches to professional development, such as consultation, coaching, communities of practice, lesson study, mentoring, reflective supervision and technical assistance. Professional development opportunities can range from a single workshop to a semester -long academic course, to services offered by a medley of different professional development providers.

They vary widely with respect to the philosophy, content, and format of the learning experiences. Professional development is a broad term, encompasses a range of people, interests and approaches. Those who engage in professional development share a common purpose of enhancing their ability to do their work. At the heart of professional development is the individual's interest in lifelong learning and increasing their own skills and knowledge. (NPDC, 2008)

Continuing education is also referred to as professional development and, more recently, as updating or retooling, all of which encompasses the approaches and content tailored for information workers to advance their learning and education once they are in the workforce. Professional development can be had through both formal and informal means and it enables a professional to perform his or her role effectively and efficiently. This study intends to find out the various professional development programs organized by NLA and how it has impacted on the continuous professional development needs of the librarianship in the changing trends in library services. (Roy, 2012)

**Related Researches on Library Associations**

In Ghana, the university libraries for instance, have come up with numerous continuous development programs which aim at upgrading the skills of librarians in other to help them in carrying out their duties effectively and efficiently for greater output. The attainment of library jobs is heavily reliant on librarians. Whatever the library's aims and objectives are, they cannot be met without the help of librarians. Librarians can execute their different duties and responsibilities more efficiently and at a more advanced level with the appropriate skills and knowledge gained via the continuous development programs. (Lampey & Agyen-Gyasi, 2010)

In Japan Library Association’s role in continuous development programmes of librarians stated that since library services are changing to meet up with current trends, there is every need for a rise in training needs of librarians of the library. This in other words will ensure that librarians are kept abreast with current innovation in information retrieval, storage and dissemination. Also, in an organization, staff continuous development is disquieted about the attainment and development of information, techniques, abilities, together with the experience that enables a staff member to make the most effective contribution to the combined efforts of the team of which he is a member. (Al-Suqri, 2010)

Studies have shown that continuous training is the key to enhancing the public library services being provided by the workers. Training is an integral part of vocational or career development and it is fast becoming a global and pervasive phenomenon in any establishment, the absence of which spells doom for such an institution and the presence of which determines the success of any enterprise. The library no doubt cannot do without adequate continuous development training of their workers to be dynamic enough to cope with the changing needs of the public who make up their user population. It has been argued that continuous professional development strengthens not only knowledge and skills necessary for competent performance but also values and attitudes necessary for the service orientation of a profession. Librarians owe it to their clients and to themselves as competent professionals, to remain abreast of trends and developments in the field.(Ajidahun , 2007)

**Nigeria Library Association and the professional developments of Librarians**

In Nigeria, the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) is the professional body for all librarians in Nigeria. It started as a division of the West African Library Association (WALA). The WALA was established in 1954 as an offshoot of the UNESCO seminar on the development of public libraries in Africa held at Ibadan in 1953. The seminar resulted in the establishment of the West Africa Library Association (WALA) in 1954. Individual members of the Association, now numbering about 5000, are drawn from various types of libraries throughout the country. Every librarian would normally, belong in the first instance to one of the 37 States, Federal Capital, Territory Chapters and one or more of the eleven interest groups. One of the interest groups is the Information Technology Section. ( Gbaje, 2013)

The NLA holds an annual conference and general meetings. The conference provides a platform for its members to present papers on current trends in library and information services within a selected theme and sub-themes. Even though not clearly stated as one of its objectives, the Nigerian Library Association, like all other professional associations, plays a vital role in the professional development of its members. Most of the interest groups hold annual workshops at the national level for professional development of its members. The Information Technology Section of the association has, over the past 5 years, organized Library and Information Technology Today (LITT) training workshops to re-train its members with information technology skills for the digital work environment Gbaje (2013).

**The thirteen special interest groups of the NLA currently in existence are:**

* Academics and Research Libraries (ARL)
* Association of Government Libraries (AGOL)
* Association of News Media Librarians of Nigeria (ANLON)
* Association of Women Librarians of Nigeria (AWLIN)
* Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing (CAT &CLASS)
* Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL)
* National Association of Library & Information Science Educators (NALISE)
* Public Libraries Sections (PLS)
* Information Technology Section (ITS)
* Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA)
* Association of Libraries for Visually Handicapped (ALVH)
* Preservation and Conservation Section (PCS)
* Medical Libraries Section (MLS)

In the last fifty years, The NLA has been in the forefront of the development of the library profession in Nigeria. The Association was responsible for the establishment of the National Library of Nigeria in 1964 and the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria in 1995. The Association also played a prominent role in the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act 2011. The Association has been constantly involved in capacity building, workshops, seminars and conferences for Librarians and Information Professionals. The Association was instrumental in securing government support for the professional development and training of Library personnel. Today, the NLA has successfully mobilized its members to be aware of the global changes in the library and information sector by encouraging training and retraining in information and Communication Technology.

The association website (http://www.nla-ng.org/aboutus.html) stated that the objectives of NLA are:

1. To unite persons interested in Libraries, Librarianship and Information services;
2. To safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians;
3. To promote the establishment and development of libraries and information centre;
4. To watch legislation affecting libraries and assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries within Nigeria;
5. To promote and encourage bibliographical study, research and library cooperation and;
6. To do all lawful things as are incidental and conducive to the attainment of the above objectives and the second out of the six objectives of NLA is to safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians.

One fundamental interest of the NLA is continuous professional development of the information professionals. The NLA organizes an annual conference intended to allow for the convergence of all Information professionals. Vega and Connel (2009) noted that "conference attendance is a requirement for career advancement of many librarians, particularly those who work in colleges or universities.

**The role of Nigerian Library Association in Continuous development of Librarians**

The professional development of librarians is a vital issue throughout the library world because immense technological developments are causing rapid shifts and changes in the library profession. As well as traditional ways of acquiring, processing, storing and retrieving information have been changed by computers and telecommunication systems. Supporting this assertion Chaudhary (2001) noted that the factors that have promoted discussions of continuing education professional development for librarianship have been:

1. the vast growth of new knowledge;
2. introduction of new technology in libraries;
3. social needs of an increasing highly educated populace;
4. outreach programs to attract new groups of patrons; and
5. Changing trends in library services.

The ability of Librarians to provide creative and innovative services in this electronic era could depend on the extent to which they expose themselves to continuing professional development programmes. Evidence abound to show that library professional association play a vital role in ensuring that its members keep in tune with changes and trends in the field through training and retraining of its members.

Continuing professional development programme which simply means the additional training that professionals go through in order to improve upon skills, understand new techniques, and maintain previously learned knowledge could also be seen as an enabler to creativity and innovativeness. Similarly Bury (2010), defined continuous professional development as learning activities designed to facilitate professionals’ acquiring new competencies. Continuing Professional development programme is usually driven by several factors which include an appreciation of the information challenges encountered by users in the electronic information environment and the desire to acquire relevant skills nece*ssary* for responding effectively to the information needs of users.

**The role of NLA in Continuous development of Librarians**

Continuing training and professional development is of perennial concern in every profession and is a common theme in speeches and exhortations of library association officials and luminaries since time immemorial. Indeed, providing continuing training and professional development activities is one of the key purposes for the existence of many library associations worldwide. The approaches taken by professional bodies in supporting continuing training and professional development varies in intensity of involvement and engagement. These include policy formulation, advocacy efforts, coordination of training activities, organization of conferences, prescription of competencies and training requirements, assessment and even certification. The library association of the country has an important role and responsibility to ensure that its members are continuously trained and professionally updated to help users, the public, organizations and society to benefit from the information and knowledge economy. Even though Individuals assume primary responsibility for their own professional growth, continuing education is the result of shared responsibility as well as cooperation and interaction among library education institutions, employers and library professional associations.

Like other professional associations, library professional association have been formed with purposes such as education, human resources training, publication, and research. These activities can help members know more about their profession and work more efficiently. As a non-profit organization professional association seeks to support and promote the course of a profession, its members and affiliates. Harvey (2004) stated that there are many professional associations in Nigeria that regulate different professions. Some of the associations administer certificate examinations that qualify membership to it, while others do not. While other Professional associations set ethical standards and standard of professional conducts for members, which include benchmarks and best practices, some organize workshops, seminars and conferences.

**Types of Continuous development programmes for the development of librarians**

Everybody needs self-development professionally. By attending seminars and conferences, the managerial staff can improve professionally.The various professional development programmes includes; seminars, peer coaching, workshops, conferences, mentorship, courses, symposia real-time webcasts, and distance learning programs with interactive capabilities. Supporting this assertion, Koontz (2010), also listed the following as approaches that can be utilized for continuous development (i) in-house training conducted by in-house staff; (ii) regionally provided training; (iii) training offered by professional organization; (iv) university based courses and (v) web-based distance learning courses.

There are two types of continuous development programs for librarians: external and in- house. One of the most solid and dependable CPD platforms is Conference. There are several professional conferences with various unique learning opportunities in the scholarly publishing industries and academic library. Conferences are beneficial on several levels. They enable you to identify upcoming trends in your field or industry; exchange the appropriate practices or seek to ensure how one will deal with current trends and discover new goods and solutions, helps in the contribution to the field through presentations; meet vendors and suppliers, communicate with practitioners that are aspiring; and networking with the workers of library and information from different organizations and sectors. Job shadowing, coaching, mentorship, reading groups, and scholarship are some kinds of internal training initiatives. (Appleton, 2017)

Regional branches to local consortia of one’s professional organizations, such as the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) or American Library Association (ALA) are example about external library groups. While many organizations host events through the year (conferences not included), they offer good opportunities to attend specialty library and information-related activities. External training programs, such as workshops, seminars, webinars, and online training, are included in the professional development of librarians. (Morris, 2017)

Webinars are online meetings that take place in actual time over the Internet. A webinar typically includes a presentation as well as interactive discussion and question-and-answer sections. Participants can typically view the presenter and presentation slides on their computers while also listening to the audio stream. Webinars are a low-cost way to reach a huge viewers because participants do not need to travel to attend the session. Webinars can be recorded for later use, depending on the software used. Environmental Trends and Impact, Professionalism, Content Development, Product Development, Platform Mechanics, Performance Mastery, Business Development, and Strategic and Operational Business Management are the National Speakers Association's eight core competencies for webinars.

**Workshop**: Workshop is generally organized by an institution or association in order to develop certain instructional materials, book, resources material, supportive material, work book etc. Workshops can be organized to develop certain skills of librarians. Librarians could be trained in certain new information technology skills. A workshop comprises a small selected group of teachers or experts drawn from actual working situations or related experts with theories on the activities. Librarians as well as other professionals do acquire Professional growth through conferences, seminars and workshops. Gutek (2007) defined Conferences, seminars and workshops as a meeting on specialized subject area and often held in a day or more to discuss a topic of interest relevant to the organization

**Seminar:** Seminars are basically arranged to discuss current issues and problems or to share ideas. A seminar is a small group discussion in a formal setting with clear agenda. In a seminar a speaker present a theme or a set of papers and it is discussed by all those who participate. The chairperson of the seminar guides, directs, coordinates and organizes the discussion in a systematic manner in order to optimize time, resources and get more benefits.

**Mentorship**: Is pairing more knowledgeable and more experienced person with less knowledgeable and less experienced librarians. A more diffuse form of mentorship may be affected through in-house presentations by established faculty on topics of benefit to younger librarians as they work to establish their publication and service records. A mentorship arrangement, either formal or informal, can pair an experience librarian with a new hire or someone with less experience with virtual library technologies in an arrangement that can be productive for all involved.

Formal mentorship arrangements can be brokered with local professional organizations or library administration, while informal arrangements can be made by any two or more interested library staff.

Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, [social capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital), and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)"(Lake & Macquarie, 2012).

**Peer coaching:** Is a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace. Peer coaching is another means to provide opportunities for staff to learn from each other. Peer coaching focuses on the collaborative development, refinement and sharing of professional knowledge and skills.(Harris & Seegar, 2012)

**Online training:** They are programs that is an increasingly popular type of professional development for educators. These programs can be completed at the convenience of the educator from the comfort of home using the computer and the internet, he or she can access course materials listen to recorded lectures, and post assignments. A significant amount of professional development involves sharing of ideas, old and new and discussing the way to implement these ideas to benefit modern students. Online education can offer a wealth of opportunity, both personally and professionally. Personally, students who pursue an online education at an accredited university will learn more about themselves, their talents, their skills and their own personal determination to succeed.

**Conference** is a formal meeting or gathering where different people or like minds converge to share ideas and make policies that will be beneficial to their field of study. A conference can also be a gathering where a group number of people from different walks of life having the same common interest converge to share ideas; present problems in their common field and proffer solutions to same. Conference is a participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact finding, problem solving and consultation. Conference is normally smaller in scale and more select character- features which tend to facilitate the exchange of information. Eke, (2013) opines that conferences are filled with presentations which are followed by discussions. She added that the difference between a conference and a workshop is the number of attendees involved. A large meeting is usually called a conference while a smaller one is termed a workshop.

They enable you to identify upcoming trends in your field or industry; exchange the appropriate practices or seek to ensure how one will deal with current trends and discover new goods and solutions, helps in the contribution to the field through presentations; meet vendors and suppliers, communicate with practitioners that are aspiring; and networking with the workers of library and information from different organizations and sectors. Job shadowing, coaching, mentorship, reading groups, and scholarship are some kinds of internal training initiatives. (Appleton, 2017)

**Courses :** In [higher education in Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education_in_Canada) and the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education_in_the_United_States), a "course" is a unit of teaching that typically lasts one [academic term](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_term), is led by one or more instructors ([teachers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher) or [professors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professor)), and has a fixed roster of [students](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student). It usually describes an individual subject taken. Students may receive a [grade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grade_(education)) and academic [credit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit_(education)) after completion of the course. In the United Kingdom, Australia and Singapore, "course" refers to the entire programme of studies required to complete a [university](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University) degree, and the word "unit" or "module" would be used to refer to an academic course in the North American sense. A course is usually specific to the students' major and is instructed by a professor. For example, if a person is taking a library course, then the professor would teach the students librarianship and how it applies to their life and or major. Courses can also be referred to as "electives". An elective is usually not a required course, but there are a certain number of non-specific electives that are required for certain majors.

**Webinars** are online meetings that take place in actual time over the Internet. A webinar typically includes a presentation as well as interactive discussion and question-and-answer sections. Participants can typically view the presenter and presentation slides on their computers while also listening to the audio stream (Atulomoh & Onuaha, 2011)

**Symposia:** This symposium brings together researchers from complementary fields to enhance our understanding of the communication between the librarians and their environment. Symposium will cover a broad range of topic.

**In-house training**: In In-service training Staff can be introduced to an automated library system and to the varieties of software that can be used for the development and management of an automated library. The training will help staff to update their knowledge for professional competence. An in- house training as an in-house programme for staff in many government and business enterprises. It is widely used for continuing education for teachers as well as librarians, bankers and industrial workers. (Akinpelu , 2002)

**Importance of Continuing Development Program to Librarians**

Almost all experts now believe that continuous development is necessary for librarians/information personnel to provide effective service. It is also essential since it will allow librarians to reap the full advantages of these programs and apply their newly gained skills on the job. (Rooney, 2010) Library practitioners could be insusceptible to development also as well as being hesitant to seek continuous development of professional. While library/information organizations around sixty nations' has a code of ethics which encourages it memberships to take on accountability of their continuous learning. (Tan, Gorman, and Singh, 2012; IFLA and FAIFE, 2012).

Conferences (both national and international), seminars and workshops have bemoaned and catalogued the multifaceted consequences of refusing to acquire the relevant skills necessary for innovativeness and creativity in Library and information services delivery. In Nigeria specifically, the NLA, has emulated the IFLA in creating specialized subject oriented sections such as cataloguing and classification section, information technology sections, medical libraries section. Workshops and training are intermittently organized for the sections with the theme and subthemes covering new trends in the specific area of concerned sections. Continuous professional development programme is important because it is generally seen as the process by which professionals improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and also develop the personal qualities required in their professional practice

The 21st century information professional must possess skills in selection, content management, knowledge management, organization of information on intranets and the Internet, research services, developing and maintaining digital libraries, and bringing information resources to the desktop which requires educators to assess the skills needed so as to prepare the students for employment challenges which makes them important and relevant in their fields. The Other important of professional development programs is that its helps in human resources reserve, faster decision, improvement in employee morale, availability for future personnel needs of the organization, improvement in health and safety, reduced supervision, personal growth and organizational stability (Varalakshmi,2006)

**Problems associated with attending professional Development programmes**

**Cost of participation**: Cost is important to the convention attendance decision Cost of participation in a conference includes cost of registration, transportation, accommodation, and food. (Yoo & Wang, 2015)

**Lack of sponsorship**: If a librarian is not sponsored to the national conference, which might be expensive, it discourages the person from attending. Sponsorship could come from the institution where the librarian serves or from NLA as a means of encouraging people to be active members of the association. say that, "in some cases, a company offers a limited number of places for their employees to attend a convention and many may apply for this support which can often become competitive between colleagues." (Ramirez& Selin, 2014 )

**Lack of interest:** Lack of interest in a conference might be due to stale programme, poor quality, unattractive conference venue, poor quality of invited keynote speakers, lack of rapport among association members, poor quality of food and accommodation provided, lack of social activities, unavailability of conference resources for purchase.

**Unacceptance of submitted papers**: Papers are accepted primarily because of quality. When some papers are rejected and others are accepted, those whose papers were rejected may not wish to attend the conference.

**Lack of awareness:** Some librarians say that they do not hear about the NLA annual conference/AGM and the call for papers. They do not have an opportunity to submit a paper and this may negatively affect their decision to attend the conference.

**Recommendations**

* Conference fees should be provided to the librarians to help them attend the continuous development programmes
* Librarians should have opportunities for sponsorship from the library or university management
* The continuous development programmes should be packed full by providing relevant information on current trend in modern librarianship.
* The Nigerian Library Association should encourage librarians to publish in the associations programmes
* There should be adequate awareness of the various sections in the NLA continuous development programmes.

**Conclusions**

Continuous Professional development is very essential for any information professional who wants to remain relevant in this fast changing economy. Various continuous professional development programmes for information professionals are organized quarterly, annually and biannually through conferences and workshops, training and meeting. It also discusses that the continuous professional development programmes organized for librarians will be of importance to the information professionals because the skills they will acquire in these programmes will help them to work in both the traditional and electronic environment. However, the paper pointed out challenges faced in attending this professional developments programmes which includes; lack of sponsorship, lack of awareness and cost of participation.

The library association of any country has an important role and responsibility to ensure that its members are continuously trained and professionally updated to help users, the public, organizations and society to benefit from the information and knowledge economy. The PDS is an important response to one of the major consequences of rapid change in the information and technological environment (i.e. knowledge obsolescence) that affects every profession. It seeks to extend the education and learning effort of a professional throughout the lifespan of his/her professional life by establishing a framework which encourages and demand continuing professional development.

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