

Staff Retooling for Service Delivery at University of Nairobi Main Campus Library, Kenya

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Abstract

Over the last decade, service delivery in public academic libraries has been influenced by ever-changing client needs. These needs have been largely driven by challenges being experienced by these libraries in relation to funding and staff retooling. The needs of library users require a level of anticipation that can deliver results if academic libraries are to sustain delivery of services. To meet this growing demand, academic librarians must continuously acquire more skills and competencies to deliver services that meet the needs of the patrons. Staff retooling is an area that, if seriously invested in by an organisation, can lead to a better work environment, high staff retention and better delivery of services. The objective of this study was to establish the effectiveness of staff retooling strategies and programmes on service delivery at the University of Nairobi library. The study was based on the resource based view theory. It used a descriptive survey research design and a census sampling method to select 62 respondents. Data was collected using standardised self-administered questionnaires then analysed using a statistical software (SPSS v21). Data was thematically analysed and results presented in tables as frequencies and percentages. The results showed that service delivery was majorly affected by staff orientation, conferences/workshops, regular ICT training and mentoring. It further established that mentoring, orientation, regular ICT training, conferences/workshops and job rotation were effective in delivering services. Case studies were however not found to be effective. The study concluded that various staff retooling strategies and programmes affected service delivery. The study recommended that a structured, systematic and regular mechanism of training and developing library staff should be developed, supported and implemented within the library; the dynamic needs of users need to be identified and library staff promptly identified for retooling in order to address these emerging needs.

Keywords: *Retooling, Service delivery, Training and development, Staff attitude, Staff performance*

1.0 Introduction

In the past few years, higher education in Kenya has experienced a decline in terms of student numbers. This has been attributed to a decrease in university placement numbers and more universities being given charters over the years. This phenomenal decrease, having taken place within a short period of time when universities are grappling with financial constraints, has affected service delivery in academic libraries. According to Wawire and Messah (2010), severe competition for government funding in Kenya has worsened the already tight environment that academic libraries were operating in as they try to justify their existence.

The needs of library users require a level of anticipation that can deliver results if academic libraries are to sustain delivery of services. Over the years, users of academic libraries have become demanding as their needs become dynamic and personalised. In Kenya, due to the problems bedevilling public Universities, their academic libraries are facing challenges of poorly trained staff and dwindling funding. The two factors have been a major hindrance in the provision of services, majorly because academic libraries support pedagogy and research. Library spaces in public academic libraries are no longer adequate (Ateka, 2018), users are demanding technologically developed services (Momanyi & Achimwanyi, 2017), while mechanisms of service delivery have remained the same.

Musangi (2015) opines that traditional library models that were used in providing information to patrons are no longer working for the current generation of patrons. The new generation of users are more demanding and are turning out to be

digital natives. This has made users of academic libraries to think

differently about information and the technologies that accompany it. According to a study by Anyira (2011), there are a number of factors in the 21st century that seriously hinder the librarian from effectively delivering services. The study identified lack of relevant skills as one of the factors. It recommended that librarians develop their ICT skills; take part in training and development; participate in workshops and conferences; and prioritise ICT skills in recruiting librarians. It is through this way that services in the library will be enhanced. According to Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013), academic librarians have to reposition themselves in the 21st century so as to effectively deliver services.

Information explosion and continuous development of information technology and its use in the library has led to a shift and growth in the demand for information by the patrons. To meet this growing demand, academic librarians must therefore continuously acquire more skills and competencies to deliver services that meet the demands of patrons (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). Gitau (2016) conducted a study on the practices of staff retooling in which he sought to establish the relationship between staff training and development and delivery of information services in selected public university libraries in Kenya.

The study found that academic librarians were aware of the various avenues they can explore to get relevant training and development. These included seminars, conferences and workshops. According to the study, the main reason for academic librarians to engage in training and

development was to enhance service delivery.

Organisations worldwide have noted the importance of training and developing their workforce. The re-training of staff is currently being considered a key function by organisations seeking to achieve their set goals.

Staff training and development, also known as staff retooling, is the process by which the individual staffer, group of staffers or the organisation commits its staff to abilities and skills to better perform their functions, solve problems and achieve set goals and objectives (Ballantyne et al., 2002). It involves the acquisition of new skills and knowledge by a member of an organisation thus empowering them to perform better in the discharge of their duties and delivery of services.

Long et al (2016) posit that training and development is an educative process in the organisation; one which enables employees to learn new ideas and also polish on old ones while strengthening on the already possessed skills and knowledge. According to Long et al. (2016), training and development encompasses factors such as cost of training, training programmes, type of training, policy on training and the training needs of the employee.

A study was conducted by Dawo et al. (2012) in selected universities in Kenya with an aim to establish how the job performance of academic librarians was being influenced by staff development practices. The study established that staff development policies were available in academic institutions in Kenya but staff in those institutions could not prove they were effective. The University of Nairobi (UoN) has in the recent past been putting efforts in ensuring

that its employees are better equipped to delivery services. Lately, the UoN has been facing financial constraints which is occasioned by inadequate funding by the government against a high population of staff resulting in a ballooning wage bill. In regard to its policy, the UoN has endeavoured to retool its employees so as to be able to deliver the much needed services. According to Njoka (2016), the UoN has been spending vast amounts of money on training and development of staff without being able to relate it to service delivery.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This was because of its ability to significantly research questions associated with this research area. The University of Nairobi was selected for the study because it has one of the biggest fully fledged academic libraries in Kenya with a big number of library staff within Nairobi County main campus. The UoN main campus library was therefore best suited to provide the information needed in this study with regard to public universities.

The target population entailed 62 library staff from UoN. Census method was utilised. Data was collected using standardized self-administered questionnaires then analysed using a statistical software (SPSS v21). Data was thematically analysed and results presented in tables as frequencies and percentages. The questionnaire was piloted and necessary adjustments made to ensure clarity of questions and alignment to the objective of the study.

3.0 Results

The study attained a response rate of 92% having distributed 62 questionnaires and getting back 59 properly marked and completed questionnaires. This response rate

is considered acceptable and credible according to recommendations by Bailey (2010). The study had a slightly higher number of female respondents of 37 (62%) as compared to male respondents at 22 (38%). The respondents were mostly youthful between the ages of 26 to 33 years (37%) and 34 to 41 years (29%). The others were over 41 years (22%) and between 18 to 25 years (12%). Most of the respondents had

an undergraduate degree (47%) and a diploma (32%). This means that the participants have operational knowledge that is relevant to their areas of work within the library. According to Gadenne (1998), the educational level is a relevant success element in service delivery. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Demographic Information	% (n)
Gender	
Male	38% (22)
Female	62% (37)
Age	
18 – 25 years	12% (7)
26 – 33 years	37% (22)
34 – 41 years	29% (17)
over 41 years	22% (13)
Education Level	
Certificate	7% (4)
Diploma	32% (19)
Undergraduate degree	47% (28)
Masters	12% (7)
PhD	2% (1)

Effectiveness of staff retooling strategies and programmes on service delivery

To determine the effectiveness of staff retooling strategies and programmes on service delivery, the respondents were presented with sets of questions bordering on how the retooling strategies affected their performance in delivering services.

The respondents were asked to state if the various training strategies and programmes affected their delivery of services. In the list of training strategies and programmes were: classroom training, conferences/workshops, mentoring, job rotation, and orientation, further studies, case studies, regular ICT training and professional association platforms. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Effects of Retooling strategies and Programmes on Service Delivery

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Classroom training assists me in acquiring important knowledge helpful in delivering services in the library	15.5% (9)	46.6% (28)	8.6% (5)	17.2% (10)	12.1% (7)
Conferences/workshops allow for advancement of knowledge in the delivery of services	20.7% (12)	55.2% (33)	5.2% (3)	13.7% (8)	5.2% (3)
Job rotation enables me to brush up on the different services provided within the library	43.1% (26)	29.3% (17)	3.4% (2)	17.2% (10)	7% (4)
Staff orientation allows for the basic understanding of the services provided in the library	19% (11)	62.1% (37)	1.7% (1)	12% (7)	5.2% (3)
Further studies allow me to acquire advanced knowledge that is helpful in providing better services	39.7% (24)	36.2% (21)	3.5% (2)	10.3% (6)	10.3% (6)
Mentoring enables me to observe first-hand how services are provided	32.7% (19)	53.4% (32)	7% (4)	1.7% (1)	5.2% (3)
Case studies provide a learning opportunity on how others are providing their services	13.8% (9)	29.3% (17)	5.2% (3)	20.7% (12)	31% (18)
Professional associations provide a platform for us to share our experiences	12.1% (7)	43.1% (26)	10.3% (6)	24.2% (14)	10.3% (6)
Regular ICT training enables us sharpen our IT skills in the digital environment	22.4% (13)	58.6% (35)	1.7% (1)	12.1% (7)	5.2% (3)

Most of the respondents agreed that classroom training equipped them with important knowledge helpful in delivering services in the library (46.6%); conferences/workshops allowed them to advance their knowledge in the delivery of services (55.2%); job rotation enabled them to familiarise themselves with the different services provided in the library (43.1%); while staff orientation led to basic understanding of the services provided in the

library (62.1%). Respondents also agreed that further studies allowed them to acquire advanced knowledge that was helpful in providing better services (39.7%); mentoring enabled them to observe first-hand how services are provided (53.4%); professional associations provided a platform for them to share their experiences (43.1%); while regular ICT training enabled them to sharpen their ICT skills in the digital environment (58.6%). However, most of the

respondents disagreed that case studies provided them with an opportunity to learn how other libraries are providing their services (31%).

The findings show that the provided retooling strategies and programmes all affect service delivery except case studies.

However, service delivery is affected by these retooling strategies and approaches in different ways as each is provided at different periods of the library staff career. These findings are however not in tandem with the findings by Thomas (2012) who found that on the job training, including orientations, job rotation, in house demonstrations and mentoring are not effective in training library staff because

they are done haphazardly, without plan and coordination, hence negatively affecting how services are delivered. A study by Maina and Waithaka (2017), however, found that library employees gain immensely from off the job training through knowledge transfer that takes place during their training.

Skills are also developed that help solve problems and make decisions in delivering services. Professionals and academicians take advantage of the off-job training to impart to employees the relevant knowledge. The study also sought to establish the level of effectiveness of the retooling strategies and programmes in service delivery as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Level of Effectiveness of Retooling Strategies and Programmes

	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Conferences/workshops	75.9%	5.2%	18.9%
Classroom training	62.1%	8.6%	29.3%
Staff orientation	81.1%	1.6%	17.3%
Mentoring	86.2%	6.9%	6.9%
Case studies	43.1%	5.2%	51.7%
Further education	75.9%	3.5%	20.6%
Regular ICT training	81.0%	1.7%	17.3%
Job rotation	72.4%	3.5%	24.1%

In terms of the effectiveness of various retooling strategies, most of the respondents (75.9%) agreed that conferences/workshops were effective, classroom training (62.1%), staff orientation (81.1%), mentoring (86.2%), further education (75.9%), regular ICT training (81%) while 72.4% agreed that job rotation was effective.

Some 51.7% of the respondents, however, disagreed that case studies were effective

retooling strategies. These findings imply that mentoring is the most effective retooling strategy and programme followed by staff orientation, regular ICT training, conferences/workshops, further education, job rotation and finally classroom training.

According to Arthur et al. (2013), the option of training and development technique for certain expertise and activities will result in varying results of effectiveness depending

on the training delivery approach selected. Different training and development programmes will therefore differ in their effectiveness. Some training and development programmes will be more effective than others. According to Bakan (2000), mentoring is considered the most effective strategy for training and developing staff. Job rotation is always effective because it provides an employee with broad experience in terms of familiarising themselves with various aspects of the organisation's functions.

4.0 Conclusion

There are various retooling strategies and programmes that academic libraries can utilise. These include classroom training, conferences/workshops, staff rotation, further studies, mentoring, case studies, professional association platforms, regular ICT training, and classroom training, among others. Despite the availability of the various strategies and programmes, each affects the retooling process differently.

Classroom training assists in changing a person's perspective, conferences/workshops assist in exchange of skills in a professional setup, job rotation is good at offering a holistic perspective, staff rotation enables staff familiarise with different services offered in a different sections, staff orientation allows for basic understanding of library operations, further studies help to advance skills for managerial positions, mentoring enables staff have first-hand experience on how to deliver services through guidance, professional association

platforms are for sharing experiences and regular ICT training helps in sharpening ICT skills in the digital environment. Case studies, however, did not provide learning opportunities for library staff.

Apart from case studies, all other retooling strategies and programmes had a positive effectiveness on service delivery. Conferences/workshops, classroom training, staff orientation, mentoring, further studies, regular ICT training and job rotation were effective in delivering library services.. The effectiveness of each strategy and programme depended on how the training approach was delivered.

The study recommends that the management of the university and the library should provide the needed support towards staff training and development. This can be done through offering a fair opportunity for staff at all the levels within the library to be trained and developed based on their needs. A suitable training and development tool should be developed within the institution to be able to identify the specific needs of the library staff so as to directly provide content that is linked to their needs.

A structured, systematic and regular mechanism of training and developing library staff should be developed, supported and implemented within the library. Finally, the dynamic needs of library users need to be identified and library staff promptly identified for training and development in order to address these emerging needs.

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