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Supervision of Special Collections in Federal and State University Libraries in Nigeria

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Introduction

Management is planning, organizing, and supervising in organisations or institutions like university libraries. There are several interpretations of the term "supervision," but typically supervisors oversee the productivity and progress of employees who report directly to them. For example first level supervisor supervise entry level employees. Supervision requires leadership, although leadership does not necessarily involve supervision (Mcnamara, 2008). Leader and supervisors may struggle because they have not mastered the fundamental structures and processes of leadership and supervision, including inspecting performance, instructing and guiding, correcting and advising staff.

In this study, special collections refers to information resources collected because of their special nature, rarity, type, subject, and origin. It includes United Nations publications, Africana, Archives, and Government publications. Love and Feather (1998) describe special collections as materials which are distinguished by their age, rarity, provenance, subject, or some other defining characteristic. The origin of modern special collections can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries,when book collecting was a private endeavour and the antiquarian book trade developed (Genest & Salter, 2003).

The future of special collections in federal and state Nigerian university libraries is threatened by inadequate collections, inaccessibility of information materials, inadequate space and facilities for staff and clients, lack of online databases, unavailability of document request. These worrisome problems persist due to the continued poor supervision of special collections (Okore,1998;Onifade,2006; and Asogwa,2003), The problem of this study put as a question is: what supervisory styles have been adopted in managing special collections in federal and state university libraries in Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess supervisory styles adopted in managing special collections in Nigerian federal and state university libraries. Specifically, the study is designed to assess the extent to which various approaches are adopted.

Literature Review

In this study, materials collected because they are primary sources, unique, and rare, are regarded as special collections. Sturges (1998) reviews the literature published about rare books and special collections worldwide. Issues covered include: the unique nature of the collections; access; preservation; dispersals, standards and ethics, staffing and training; and the role of bibliography and scholarship. According to Macnamara (2008), special collections professional provide management in varying roles and settings. Skills in managing people, resources, material, and projects are required.

Adebayo (2009) emphasises the need for adequate manpower and facilities with peer group assessment to assure quality.

Usoro (2009) discusses the organising function, which is breaking down tasks into individual assignments, and delegation of authority to the supervisor of the unit. McKinzie (2000) describes a system of checks and balances in supervising materials, including special collections.

There are different kinds of supervision and styles of supervisory leadership. Gent and Kempster (2002) indicate three types of management styles: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. The laissez-faire leader is the individual described by Blake and Mouton(1995) as the "impoverished leader," who is committed neither to the task nor the team. Covey (2001) observes that, "when all the fashionable management hype and buzz words have been stripped away, what is left at the core, are the basic, universal principles such as integrity, trust, respect, fairness, and compassion." Weber's study on modern bureaucracy, quoted by Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) gives prominence to obedience to rules and regulations. Bureaucratic organisations achieve goals and efficiency by the impersonality and rationality of their actions. Griffin (1987) indicates, that "the initial goals are, of course, set by upper-level managers. The superiors and subordinates collaborate in setting goals." This applies to special collections, where the division librarian assigns duties to unit heads, who will then assign duties to their supervisees. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) explain that it is the duty of special collections librarians to enforce discipline by ensuring that all members conform to prescribed conduct. The inspection process offers an opportunity to demonstrate excellence in service delivery and levels of satisfaction (Melling and Little 2002). As Melling and Little further confirm, "a critical success factor for the leader is ensuring that the right balance of skills, experience, and expertise is available to meet all preset and foreseeable future needs." Soete (2000), stipulates that performance review for special collections librarians be goal-based and that a statement of goals should become a formal part of the evaluation.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive survey. The study was conducted in Nigerian federal and state university libraries. The libraries under study are: Bayero University Library, Kano; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Benue State University Library, Makurdi; University of Jos Library, Jos; University of Maiduguri Library; Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library Bauchi; Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria Nsukka; University of Port Harcourt Library; Ambrose Ali University Library, Ekpoma; Nnamdi Azikiwe University Library Awka; University of Ibadan Library; and University of Ife Library, Ile-Ife. The population consists the library management staff which comprises heads of units and divisions, librarians and library officers who have worked in special collections for five years. There is a total of 282 library staff, including 131 library management staff, 70 librarians, and 81 library officers. Twelve university libraries, representing 60 percent, were purposively selected from the twenty federal and state university libraries with special collections. These universities were selected because they represent the six geopolitical zones and have special collections. The 178 library staff, including 81 library management, 47 librarians, and 50 library officers were purposively used as a sample.

The instrument that was used for this study was structured questionnaire. The instrument is captioned "Special Collection Management in University Libraries Questionnaire" (SCMULQ) designed by the researcher.

The instrument was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was constructed on a four-point Likert rating scale of High Extent (HE) (4pts), Moderate Extent (ME) (3pts), Low Extent (LE) (2pt), Very Low Extent (VLE) (1pt). The researcher used descriptive statistical methods to analyze the data. The researcher used mean in answering the research question. A criterion mean of 2.50 was recommended as acceptable. Therefore, any mean below 2.50 was not acceptable.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the extent to which various approaches are used for supervision of special collections division in Nigerian university libraries?

The librarians were asked to indicate the extent to which various approaches are used for supervision of special collections..

Table 1: Mean responses on the extent to which various approaches are used for supervision of special collections (n=135)

S/No	Statement	BUK	ABU	Ramat Uni Maid	ATBU	Benue State Uni	Uni Jos	OAU	UI	UNN	NAU	UNI Port	AAU	Overall ean	Re-marks
Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean		Mean				
1	Routine checks of subordinates are carried out very often	3.38	2.77	3.13	3.33	2.86	2.70	3.08	3.06	3.42	3.13	3.00	3.56	3.13	*
2	Periodic evaluation of stock is carried out often	3.38	2.62	3.00	2.93	3.00	2.50	2.92	2.59	2.95	2.88	3.00	2.89	2.86	*
3	Erring staff are reprimanded promptly.	2.13	2.77	2.00	2.13	2.14	2.50	3.42	2.76	2.95	2.63	3.11	3.22	2.69	*
4	Regular meetings with staff are held	2.38	2.69	2.75	2.67	2.57	2.80	2.75	3.00	2.84	2.63	2.67	2.78	2.74	*
5	Enforcing laws autocratically	1.25	1.77	1.75	1.07	1.29	1.90	1.58	1.59	1.63	1.75	1.67	1.89	1.59	**
6	Adopting a laissez fair attitude towards supervision	1.25	1.77	1.75	1.07	1.29	1.90	1.58	1.59	1.63	1.75	1.67	1.89	1.59	**
7	Handling subordination With levity.	1.75	2.00	1.75	1.67	1.43	1.70	1.42	1.76	1.84	1.88	1.89	2.00	1.76	**
8	Adopting a liberal supervisory style.	3.25	2.69	3.00	3.07	3.00	1.80	2.58	2.12	2.21	2.38	2.33	2.89	2.56	*

* Used ** Not Used

Data reveal that 5 out of the 8 items are greater than the decision mean value of 2.50. They indicated high use of routine checks of subordinates, moderate use of periodic evaluation of stock, regular meetings with staff, erring staff are reprimanded, and adopting a liberal supervisory style having values of 3.13, 2.86, 2.74, 2.69, and 2.56, respectively, indicating acceptance of the approaches, while 3 of the items, handling subordinate with levity, adopting a laissez-faire attitude, and enforcing laws autocratically having values of 1.76, 1.59, and 1.86, respectively, indicating very low use of those approaches.

One university librarian stated that a hierarchical structure was used to manage staff and divisions in the library. The finding is consistent with Melling and Little (2002), who confirmed that a critical success factor is the right balance of skills, experience, and expertise. The also supports Soete (2001) who advises that performance review for special collections librarians be goal-based. The low ranking of enforcing laws autocratically, adopting a laissez-faire attitude, and handling subordinates with levity is understandable, because those styles prevent harmony and good leadership in the working place.

Conclusion

Routine checks of subordinates, periodic evaluation of stock, regular meetings with staff, reprimanding of erring staff, and a liberal supervisory style are the approaches used for effective supervision of special collections in federal and state Nigerian university libraries. The finding of this study on periodic evaluation is line with the one of Soete (2001). The finding that erring staff are reprimanded is line with Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) who observe that it is the duty of special collections librarian to enforce discipline. Griffin (1987) confirms the finding on regular meetings in his analysis on management by objective, indicating that the organizational goals are communicated to everyone, management periodically meets with each subordinate to check progress, and managers hold an evaluation meeting with each subordinate to assess how goals were met. Based on the above findings, the library managers should make it a point of duty to develop successful approaches and mechanisms to handle the supervision of special collections materials in Nigerian university libraries.

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