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Human Capital for Nigerian Libraries in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Studies of libraries in general and university libraries in particular have consistently reported inadequate levels of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) literacy as one of the major problems facing libraries in Nigeria as they move into the 21st century. ICT infrastructure development and poor funding have been identified as problems, followed by poor ICT skills among staff (Oduwole, 2005; Adedoyin 2005). These are the same problems confronting libraries in most developing countries. Amekuedee (2005) reported similarly for Ghana and Qian Zhou (2005) for China.

What are the implications of this lack of ICT skills for the human capital development efforts and programmes of developing countries such as Nigeria? This paper describes human development programmes needed by countries such as Nigeria to prepare its libraries and its citizens for the new information and information technology of the 21st century.

Human Capital and Development

Human capital may be defined as the total stock of knowledge, skills, competencies, and innovative abilities possessed by the population. Among the most important changes that characterize the 21st century are, "the increasing importance of knowledge as a driver of economic growth; the information and communication revolution;

the advent of a worldwide labour market and global socio-political transformations" (World Bank 2002).

Human capital development has become a core element in the development efforts of developing countries, in the knowledge society of the 21st century. This is because, "comparative advantage among nations derive less and less from natural resources and cheap labour endowment and increasingly from technical innovations and the competitive use of knowledge" (World Bank 2002:8). In the new environment, the learning paradigm has changed. The new paradigm is lifelong learning, in which there is less emphasis on remembering facts and basic data, and more emphasis on process, analytical knowledge, skills, and competences. The emphasis is "learning to learn; learning to transform information into new knowledge; and learning to translate new knowledge into applications" (World Bank, 2002:29). In this new paradigm, cooperative education is central. Periods of institution-based learning produce the foundation of knowledge, and the acquisition of work-related skills, competences, and practices in relevant workplaces build on this foundation. The training of librarian for the 21st century must follow this paradigm.

The Poverty of Human Capital Development in Nigeria

In Nigeria today, both the informal and formal education system may produce mediocrity, because students do not acquire both theoretical and practical skills. The formal system produces people with facts and theoretical knowledge but limited practical skills. The apprenticeship system produces people with limited practical skills and no theoretical knowledge (Ogbimi, 1999:58). The new educational paradigm can remedy this situation.

The Library of the 21st Century

The library of the 21st century has been appropriately described as a digital library. The library in a 21st century Nigeria will combine digital and traditional library elements. Abandoning all the elements of a traditional library would be unsuitable for Nigeria, where illiteracy is still high and ICT literacy very low.

A digital library has been variously defined. A comprehensive definition is provided by the Digital Library Federation:

Organizations that provide the resources including specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities (Raitt, 1999 quoted in Zhou, 2005:433).

Training of the librarian for the 21st century must be mainly in the mode of a digital librarian. Zhou (2005), describes the responsibilities of a digital librarian:

- Select, acquire, preserve, organize and manage digital collection;
- Design the technical architecture of digital library
- Plan, implement, and support digital services such as information navigation, consultation and transmit services;
- Establish friendly user interface over network;
- Set up relative standards and policies for the digital library;
- Design, maintain and transmit add-valued information products;
- Protect digital intellectual property in network environment; and
- Insure information security.

He also describes digital library service:

- Analyzing and processing different kinds of information resources;
- Activating and finding potential value hidden in any information;
- Providing added-value information products and services at right time and right and place;
- Finding the right users for information and provide personalized and tailored services.

The Training of the Nigerian Librarian for the 21st Century

The training of librarians in Nigeria is inadequate, and needs radical restructuring to produce librarians suited to deliver service in digital library in a knowledge-based society.

The following are recommended for the training of librarians in Nigeria.

- Increase training from four academic years (eight-semester) to five and half (eleven semesters)
- Curriculum that combines library science and information management science

The eleven-semester curriculum is broken down as follows:

- A four-year (eight-semester) period of theoretical training.
- A one and a half year (three semester) practicum, with on-the-job training in varied work environments to acquire real skills and competences

The eighteen months (18 months) practical on the job training to be spent as follows: three months each in an academic organization, a private sector organization, a telecommunications organization, a military organization, and a government organization. The last three months should be spent in the organization in which the student wants to specialize.

Conclusion

The knowledge society of the 21st century is here, and Nigeria must operate in this environment. There are tools that are needed to operate in this environment. One essential tool is ICT skills. Therefore, the suggestions made in this paper require urgent attention. If the government drags its feet, the professional library association in Nigeria can take lead by insisting that librarians be so trained, starting from 2006.

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