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Evaluation of the Practicum Trainee Librarians at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

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Introduction

The Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) designed the students' Industrial Work Experiences Scheme (SIWES) as a skills training programme, which forms part of the approved minimum Academic Standard in the various degree programmes for all Nigerian Universities. It is an effort to bridge the gap between theory and practice in engineering and technology, sciences, agriculture, medicine, management, and other professional educational programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It teaches students about machines and equipment, professional methods, and ways of safeguarding work areas and workers in industries and organizations (NUC Handbook 2001). Adomi (2000) discusses library practica as a course of practical work that enables students to apply the theory they have studied.

Objectives of the Programme

- Discover the benefits of practica for students
- Provide an avenue for students in Nigerian universities to acquire skills and experience
- Prepare students for the work situation they are likely to meet after graduation
- Expose students to methods and techniques that not available in the universities
- Make the transition from the university to the world of work easier, and enhance students' contacts for later job placement
- Provide an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real work situations
- Enlist and strengthen employers' involvement in the process of preparing university graduates for employment

Placement

During the training period, the students work in all the major divisions of the library:

- Cataloguing and classification
- Collection Development
- Readers' Services
- Serials
- Special Collections
- Systems

Duration of Practice

The National Universities Commission has specified a training period of 3 months (12 weeks) at the end of 300 level, immediately after second semester examinations (during the long vacation). The programme is supervised by a unit under the Vice Chancellor's Office. This office reports its activities to the Area office of the SIWES in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out if the industrial training programme has bridged the existing gap between theory and practical work
- To find the level of exposure of student librarians to library practice
- To find out if practical training has an impact on their academic achievement
- To find out if the students are adequately supervised during the practicum

Research Questions

- To what extent are students exposed to practical library work?
- Do students perceive this work to be relevant to their academic study?
- What are the inputs of the practicing librarians to the programme?
- Does SWIES pay the student librarians' stipend as a means of motivating them during the training period?

Methodology

Study Area: Delta State University Library was used for this study. The university has three campuses: the main campus at Abraka, and the campuses in Asaba (the State Capital) and Oleh, all in Delta State, Nigeria.

Population: The population is made up of the practising librarians and undergraduate 300-level students (trainee librarians for the 2004/2005 academic session) of Delta State University, Abraka.

Sample: A random sample was chosen. 12 out of 19 professional librarians, and all the 17 trainee librarians were used for this study.

Instrument: A structured questionnaire with 15 items was developed, and observation was used as a data collection method as well.

Analysis and Data Discussion

Students

Table I: Time Allotment

The time spent for students' practicum is:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
A waste of time	1	5.9
A useful period in the training of student librarian	16	94.1
The time could have been spent doing other things	-	-
Is a repetition of known things	-	-
Total	17	100

Table II: Supervision

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Thoroughly coordinated by the heads of the Units	14	82.3
Poorly coordinated by the Units heads	1	5.9
Mastered by the student Librarians	1	5.9
Not thoroughly explained to the students by the subordinates	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Table III: Basis for Assessment of Practicum Students

To do well in the practicum, student librarians should:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Conform to the rules of the library units	13	76.5
Subordinate him/herself without question	-	-
Carry out instructions as directed by practicing librarians	3	17.6
Suggest new ways of handling problems in the units	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Table IV: Experience Gained

Exposure to different library units gave students:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Better understanding of the activities of the library	6	35.3
Integration of classroom theory with practical work	6	35.3
Understanding of difficult lecture topics	4	23.5
Opportunities to ask questions	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Staff

Table I: Supervision

Would you agree that time spent on the students is:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
A waste of time	-	-
Useful for training student librarians	11	92
Time that could have been spent doing other things	-	-
Repetition of things already known	1	8
Total	12	1

Table II: Attitude

Would you say that the student librarians' attitude to work and authority was:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfactory	5	41.7
Not Satisfactory	-	-
Needs Improvement	7	58.3
Total	12	100

N = 12

Table III: Workload for Supervisors

Would you disagree that the burden of supervision placed on you was:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Excessive	3	25
Normal	21	17
Interfered with your routine jobs to some extent	2	17
Your personal contribution towards the training of future librarian	5	41
Total	12	100

N = 12

Table V: Experience

Based on your experience, would you advise that the programme be:

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Discontinued	3	23
Continued	2	17
Students should take the programme seriously	2	17
Members of staff should be more committed to the programme	5	41
Total	12	100

N = 12

Summary

Ninety-four percent of the students (16 out of 17) found the time spent on the practicum worthwhile. Both staff and trainee-librarians agreed that time spent on the programme exposed students to the rudiments of the profession. They also agreed that rotating through various sections of the library has a great advantage for students.

Observations of the Trainee Librarians

- There were regular power outage to ICT facilities in the library
- Lack of funds to provide necessary materials such as books
- Out-dated Information Resources
- There should be an expansion of the library to accommodate both users and library staff, including remodeling of entrance and exit gate systems

Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents were asked to make suggestion on ways to improve the programme.

- The training period of the practicum should be extended from 3 months to 6 months.
- Suggestions and ideas from student librarians should be welcomed
- Expose the trainee librarians to more jobs
- Expose the trainees to ICT facilities
- The library should improve maintenance services
- Regular shelving and shelf reading of materials is needed
- A monthly stipend should be paid to the students as a way of motivation
- Staff should be more devoted to the training the students
- Living accommodations should be provided for the students to cushion their financial burden.
- Placement letters should be given at least four months before the commencement of the programme

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