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Article information:

To cite this document:

Ezra Ondari-Okemwa, (2000) "Training needs of practising professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries: a critical analysis", Library Management, Vol. 21 Issue: 5, pp.257-268, <https://doi.org/10.1108/01435120010324969>

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Training needs of practising professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries: a critical analysis

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Keywords

On-the-job training, Librarians, Kenya, University libraries

Abstract

Examines the training needs of practising professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries. There is a general, but false assumption, in this sector that professional librarians who have attained the minimum professional qualifications need no further training on the job. Many changes have taken place and many more are likely to occur, which are likely to affect the working environment of librarians. Librarians must be trained in preparation for managing such changes. Suggestions for sources of funding are given. The specific training needs of practising librarians are described.

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Introduction

Staff training is a critical and challenging task that has come to be identified with the determination of the future of many organisations. Without relevant and appropriate training, employees of an organisation may fail to perform at the level expected of them, in the process leading to the collapse of businesses and organisations. Every organisation, regardless of its nature or size, would like to have employees who perform to its expectations, hence achieving the stated goals and objectives of the organisation.

Among other reasons, an organisation trains its staff to increase efficiency, boost morale, and improve overall performance. Forces of change may erode the efficiency, morale and performance of employees. In order to survive and operate effectively, all types of organisations must adapt and respond in a timely and flexible way to technical, economic and social changes (Buckley and Caple, 1992). In recent years, many economic social and technical changes have taken place in Kenya, which have, and will continue to affect public universities and consequently their university libraries. An urgent call to train library staff to adapt to such changes may not be out of place.

The public universities in Kenya are those operated by the government and there are five:

- (1) the University of Nairobi;
- (2) Kenyatta University;
- (3) Egerton University;
- (4) Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology; and
- (5) Moi University at Eldoret.

Of these universities, only Nairobi, Kenyatta and Moi have named university librarians. Jomo Kenyatta and Egerton have always had acting university librarians and no named deputy university librarians. The University of Nairobi library has two deputy university librarians: one in charge of administration and another in charge of technical services. Both Moi and Kenyatta have a university librarian and a deputy university librarian. For about ten years Egerton has been advertising a vacancy for a university librarian but for some strange reason, it has never been able to recruit one. The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology has also been

advertising the vacancy for a university librarian but it has never recruited one since becoming a fully-fledged university in 1993.

For some strange reason, public university libraries in Kenya, as major employers of librarians, see library school training as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. It may be a misconception, but it is widely believed in Kenya that once a person has graduated with a master's degree from library school, that marks the end of his or her training. Contrary to this belief, graduating from a library school with a master's degree should be considered to be the start of training. According to Odini (1999), the challenges presented by the accelerating pace of change in the world of information must be examined so that librarians and other information professionals can answer some of the key questions raised by this revolution and find solutions to the new century's information needs.

Aims

This study had the following broad aims:

- to sensitise library managers in the Kenyan public universities to the importance of continuous in-service training of library staff;
- to critically analyse the training needs of library staff in the Kenyan public university libraries;
- to demonstrate how library managers may source from within their budgets the financial resources for training library staff;
- to identify the specific areas in which library staff in the Kenyan public universities need training and ways of delivering training.

Methodology

Two principle methods were employed: the first was observing library staff in the Kenyan public university libraries at their places of work over a period of two years; the second was the use of personal interviews with the librarians. Neither method involved library staff in all the categories in the Kenyan public university libraries. There are three categories of library staff. Category one consists of support staff: the clerical, secretarial, security

and cleaning staff. Category two consists of those referred to as para-professional staff, consisting of library assistants and senior library assistants. These staff hold a first degree in Library Science, a diploma in Library Science or a first degree in any other discipline. Technically, staff in this category are trainees who in theory should be given first priority whenever an opportunity for further training or studies arises. This is, however, not necessarily the practice in this sector. Category three is the professional library staff who are the smallest group in numerical terms, and the best trained. The Moi University Library, for example, has 15 professional librarians out of a total of 136 full-time library staff. So 121 of the library staff members are either support staff or para-professionals.

It is the professional library staff who were observed and/or interviewed during this study. The author had the opportunity to observe and interview this group of librarians when supervising students on practical attachment training. Students of the Faculty of Information Sciences, at Moi University, undertake a period of attachment for practical training in libraries lasting six weeks in their second and third years of study. So each student must go through two sessions of practical attachment training, and all lecturers in the faculty are involved in supervising the students during their practical attachment training. Students are posted to special libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, publishing firms and records and archive centres all over the country. As a faculty supervisor, a lecturer is supposed to visit a student twice during the six weeks of practical attachment training.

During the practical attachment, a student is generally co-supervised by a faculty supervisor and a host supervisor. Host supervisors in the public universities are usually professional librarians. The lowest ranking professional librarian in the Kenyan public university libraries is an assistant librarian, while the highest ranking is the university librarian. From assistant librarian, promotion may be gained to senior assistant librarian, then to deputy university librarian and finally to university librarian. Very few librarians get promoted to the rank of university librarian before retirement. It is during the supervisory visits that the author

was able to observe and interview the professional librarians.

Of some 120 professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries, 78 were either observed and/or interviewed. Because of high turnover of library staff in this sector, the number of professional library staff is not constant. From the observations and interviews, the author carried out what he considered to be a critical analysis of the training needs of professional library staff. They were questioned about the areas in which they thought they most needed training. University librarians and deputy university librarians were also questioned about the areas they thought their staff needed training.

Training

Pepper (1992) defines training as being the organised process concerned with the acquisition of capability, or the maintenance of existing capability. In comparison, Buckley and Caple (1992) define training as a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skill, or attitude through learning experience, to achieve effective performance in an activity, or range of activities. Its purpose, in the work situation, is to enable an individual to acquire abilities in order that he or she can adequately perform a given task, or job. Both definitions are concerned with improving overall performance as a result of training.

It is not very easy to draw a clear-cut line between training, education and learning. In trying to differentiate between the three concepts, Buckley and Caple (1992) define learning as that process whereby individuals acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes through experience, reflection, study or instruction. On the other hand, education is a process and a series of activities which aims to enable an individual to assimilate and develop knowledge, skills, values and understanding that are not simply related to a narrow field of activity, but allow a broad range of problems to be defined, analysed and solved.

Preparation as a professional librarian

To qualify for appointment at entry level – that is assistant librarian – the requirement is

a minimum of a master's degree in library science or a master's degree in any of the information sciences. A postgraduate diploma in library science is no longer recognised as being a sufficient minimum qualification for appointment as assistant librarian. Holders of first degree in library science, diploma in library science and even holders of postgraduate diploma or higher national diploma may only be appointed as library assistants or as senior library assistants at best. Though these para-professionals are not recognised as professional library staff, they are not excluded from performing professional duties in the Kenyan academic libraries. Some of them perform even better than professional staff members. Most para-professional library staff would like to receive further training for the purpose of promotion but there are many barriers.

A master's degree in any discipline is a relatively high academic qualification in a developing country such as Kenya where less than 20 percent of high school graduates get access to university or college education. With this kind of high-sounding qualification, one may wonder if professional librarians may need further in-service training. Put another way, is it really necessary to spend any more financial resources on training practising professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries? A person in the know would answer in the affirmative.

Need for in-service training

In whatever way the activities of management are identified, and whatever the nature of an organisation, training staff is an essential part of the function of management. The need for continuous training of library staff in Kenya and elsewhere in the region should be even more evident because of the rapid changes in information technology (IT). It is important that library staff are continuously trained so that they are equipped with new techniques of handling and managing information. The implication here is that there should be a deliberate continuous analysis of training needs of library staff.

No public university library in Kenya has anything akin to a training unit that could be charged with this responsibility, and for the co-ordination of training. The lack of a training unit located within a library implies

that there is a lack of a continuous analysis of training needs. Training co-ordination is a central responsibility in the Kenyan public universities. The problem with this arrangement is that the university's central administration may not understand the training needs of library staff. A university library needs to establish a training unit headed by a high-ranking professional library staff member with an understanding of human resources management as it relates to staffing an academic library.

The training of library staff may help to sustain economic and effective performance and also optimise the contribution to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the public universities. Training on the job may also help librarians in the public university libraries to improve their knowledge and skills and develop positive attitudes towards their profession.

There are other advantages in training librarians on the job:

- training may increase the confidence, motivation and commitment of librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries;
- training may provide recognition, enhance responsibilities, and bring the possibility of increased pay and promotion that may help to boost the morale of librarians;
- training may give personal satisfaction and achievement to librarians and broaden opportunities for career advancement;
- training may improve the quality of library staff and consequently the quality of delivery of services;
- training may help to improve the levels of efficiency, effectiveness and general competence of the library staff;
- training may help reconcile the gap between what should happen and the desired targets and standards of performance: and what actually happens and the levels of work performance achieved.

Training library staff for management of change

Many changes took place in Kenya in the 1990s. There have been technological changes, economic changes, political changes, and social changes. The Kenyan University

education system has also experienced change. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in Kenya as recommended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has had an impact on the public universities. Cost-sharing was introduced in the public universities following the implementation of the SAPs as one of the measures to cut down on government expenditure. This means that students have to pay part of the cost of their education. Before cost-sharing was introduced in 1994, university education in the public sector was virtually free. The cost-sharing measure was resisted by students just as any other change would be, but it is now accepted that the government can no longer afford to provide free university education.

Funding to public universities in Kenya has been significantly reduced. Universities in the recent past have been encouraged to find ways and means of generating income to supplement whatever funds they get from the government. Most public universities have started what has popularly come to be known as parallel degree programmes for the purpose of generating income. Students admitted to these programmes in the public universities meet the minimum requirements of university entry, but because of a shortage of facilities, all those meeting the minimum entry requirements may not be admitted to the regular academic programmes in the public universities. Only the best qualified are admitted to the regular programmes. So, such students are admitted to programmes which run parallel to the regular programmes and fully pay their education costs. The curriculum is the same, lecturers are the same, and the only difference is that students admitted to such programmes have to fully fund themselves and do not receive an educational loan from the Kenyan government. These are intended for those who can afford to pay and who would otherwise go to foreign countries for their university or college education.

All these changes are catching library staff in the Kenyan public universities unaware. The author was able to interview library staff from every Kenyan public university library. The impression obtained was that not a single public university library had trained its staff in preparation for coping with the changes that have occurred and others, which are taking place every day. It is generally assumed that

the changes will only affect academic units, but they may have implications such as users demanding high quality library services commensurate with the cost of tuition. Users may demand service from librarians who are alert and sensitive to the users' needs, and users may demand high quality library facilities.

Inadequate pre-service training

Many employers in Kenya and in the East African region believe that graduates of library schools are job-ready and that further training is a waste of resources. It may not be surprising to discover that graduates of library schools leave college with only 50 percent or less of the competencies and skills required in the workplace. There is no library school, anywhere in the world, which could be credited with producing graduates who are 100 percent job-ready. Kenyan public university libraries, therefore, should be encouraged to train on the job not only the newly-recruited library staff, but also those staff who have been in the service for sometime.

Reading through articles authored by some scholars involved in the training of librarians and other information workers in the region, one might get the impression that training is the sole responsibility of library schools. Thapisa (1999a), for instance, gives the impression that library schools may be able to design syllabi which match the requirements of employers. It is possible, but the requirements of employers are never static. Employers' requirements keep on changing and hence the need for continuous in-service training for library staff.

In this region, the limited number of library schools are not well equipped to graduate librarians for the existing markets. Facilities for training are inadequate and those available are not well maintained. Even recruiting and retaining qualified teaching staff is a major problem. Internet browsing, on-line searching and Website page design are supposed to be taught to students giving practical hands-on experience, but because of lack of the necessary facilities, the teaching has to take a theoretical approach. Knowing where to access information effectively and efficiently should provide a librarian with a competitive edge (Thapisa, 1999b). This is only possible

in a library school that is well equipped with the necessary resources. Most library schools in the region lack even the very basic essential resources.

Specific areas of training needs

Ask any employer in Kenya today about the competencies he or she would like a librarian to have, and they will offer a long list of competencies. Information and telecommunication technologies may come at the top, or near the top, of the list of competencies. Other essential competencies may include evaluating and using computer hardware and software, understanding computer and information concepts, understanding systems analysis, and accessing information via the Internet. Library staff frequently mentioned these competencies during the face-to-face interviews. However, more than 95 percent of the library staff admitted that they totally lack these competencies. Employers advertising vacant positions in the local press also place much emphasis on these competencies. However, the author discovered that there are several other important, but often ignored areas in which library staff needed training urgently.

Self-management

This may be seen as the ability to manage oneself, or the ability to work under minimal supervision. Self-management and the use of initiative, or the ability to do the right thing without being told, are rare skills. Asked if they are capable of managing themselves, the library staff provided interesting answers. One was from a staff member who said he only makes "technical appearances" so that he may not lose his job.

Library schools may offer general management modules, but it is not easy to find a self-management module in any library school course. So this is a skill that may not be learnt in a library school, yet it was established that most library staff lack self-management skills and they need training to develop these skills. Reasons why these skills were inadequate varied, from a lack of motivation by the staff to a lack of trust shown by senior library managers. Consequently, library staff

tend not to have self-confidence and cannot work without close supervision.

Teamwork skills

Teamwork spirit was found to be lacking, and staff hardly work as teams. It is as if teamwork spirit is being imposed on library staff: they have to be seen to work as teams. An analysis of the degree of teamwork spirit in the libraries revealed that staff work as teams within the same ethnic group, or in teams of the same rank. Given a choice, no library assistant would work in a team of assistant librarians or senior assistant librarians. He or she would prefer to work in a team of library assistants or senior library assistants. Hall (1999) carried out a study that was aimed to develop a better understanding of the skills required in teamwork in the British university libraries. Some of the skills found to be important in teamwork included communication, decision making and leadership. More than half the Kenyan staff interviewed were not sure whether they had these skills.

Some library staff argued that a teamwork spirit cannot be imagined because of such reasons as a lack of mutual trust, as library staff not involved in making decisions which affect them, and promotions are extremely rare and selectively awarded when they are available. When there are openings for promotion, merit, experience and such other qualifications are never given serious consideration. Ethnicity, friendship and closeness to the university librarian weigh more than all the other qualifications put together. In one public university library, it was alleged that the university librarian and the deputy university librarian came from the same village and are even probably related. It was further alleged that the university librarian was about to retire and had strategically placed his person to take over as university librarian. In this particular university library, it was alleged that most senior assistant librarians are from the same ethnic group as the university librarian and the deputy university librarian. Even though it may not be by design, this kind of situation cannot promote teamwork.

Other reasons which were given as hindering the teamwork spirit included a total lack of training opportunities, low morale,

poor remuneration, and sexual harassment. Two female staff members from the same library mentioned sexual harassment, but they were unwilling to elaborate. Training opportunities were said to be rare and when they arise, only a few staff are nominated selectively. A case was cited in one university library where the university librarian nominated a relative for a scholarship only to discover that the relative who turned down the offer was pregnant. The donor who provided the scholarship had specifically instructed the librarian to nominate a female library staff member for training in a foreign country. The university librarian wrote back to the donor saying that there was no suitable woman who could be nominated at that time. This was not true because there were several other female staff members who were even better placed for nomination, except that they were not close enough to the university librarian as a first qualification for nomination. Teamwork skills may or may not be taught at college, hence, the need for library managers to facilitate the development of teamwork skills for themselves, and their library staff. Library managers should also learn to avoid adopting management styles which discourage the teamwork spirit.

Communication

Librarians and libraries are basically communicators of information. Public university libraries in Kenya represent a major storehouse of human knowledge. If they are to be of any value, they must be able to disseminate this knowledge in large quantities to a knowledge-seeking populace. Librarians in the Kenyan public universities must be seen as being the communications links between institutions, communities and even countries as new computerised library systems make it possible to share resources.

Verbal, non-verbal, and interpersonal communication skills are important for all library staff. All university librarians who were asked about the need for training their library staff in communication said it is an important skill for a librarian but so much is taken for granted. A librarian should be able to express himself or herself clearly, communicate with users diligently, and be able to listen carefully to the users. A librarian should be able to communicate with users in such a way that

will enable users to freely express their information requirements. It is nearly impossible for a librarian to be able to satisfy the information needs of users unless such needs are clearly stated by the user. Hall (1999), when studying training needs in teamwork in British university libraries, found out that communication came top of the list.

Observation of library staff at work revealed that there is a major communication problem among professional library staff in the Kenyan situation. Poor communication sometimes discourages library users from making detailed inquiries in the libraries. Some staff lack the ability to communicate clearly with users, while others ignore users unless the users themselves initiate communication. Many users come to the library hoping somebody may be able to recognise their presence and assist them accordingly. In emphasising the need for librarians to obtain a better grasp of human communication, Taylor (1972) said: "The librarian must become a modern generalist, concerned and knowledgeable about print, sound and image, about automation and computer technology and about informal and formal communication". User studies are similar to audience research in the field of communication. Busha (1980) also emphasises the value and importance of knowing the communication needs and practices of library users and potential library users. A librarian should be able to find out if exposure to the mass media (i.e. radio, television, and newspapers, motion pictures, etc.) affects library usage.

In the Kenyan public university libraries, older employees are relied on to train newly-recruited library staff. Training and orientation are largely teaching functions. Effective teaching and training requires the ability to communicate. Students joining universities, visitors being taken around the library to be shown its resources, and new employees being trained ask many questions. A library staff member who cannot communicate well may not be able to adequately answer such questions. A librarian who is capable of communicating well can be relied on to stimulate a positive culture of information consumption and attitude in the users. The author found out that less than 10 percent of the library staff interviewed had taken a course or two in communication studies during their formal training.

The marketing of information and library services

Modern libraries, unlike the libraries of the medieval times, are not just stores of information materials. The information stored in the Kenyan public university libraries needs to be aggressively marketed to both existing and potential users. One university librarian argued that the current cohort of library staff in the public university sector totally lacks library and information services marketing skills. His strong recommendation was that the marketing of information and library services should be made a compulsory module in any modern library school curriculum. More than 75 percent of library staff interviewed in the Kenyan public university libraries indicated that they had not taken any course in any type of marketing, let alone a course in marketing information and library services.

Not everyone understands the value of information in Kenya. Not even top government policy makers know the real value of information in this era of e-commerce. Not even all the top university administrators in Kenya are aware of the strategic value of information in whatever format. Library staff should be trained so that they can market information, not only to the university communities, but also to top government policy makers and legislators. Librarians who know how to market information services could lobby top government policy makers and legislators to lower the import duty on information technology products, and for increased funding for information and library services in the Kenyan public universities. It should no longer be taken for granted that users know exactly where to go and who to ask for information. Library staff should be able to adapt a business-like approach in marketing services to users.

The University of Nairobi's main campus library recently started to allow people who are not members of the university community to use the library on payment of a fee. This is one way of generating extra income for the university. Because of its location, this has attracted many users who are employees of government departments or of the non-governmental organisations based in downtown Nairobi. Most of these users need information which can assist them to prepare for the professional exams which must be

passed in order to be promoted. This group of users value their time and money and would like to be served by library staff who are helpful and friendly.

Virtual librarianship

This is still a relatively new and strange type of librarianship among most Kenyan librarians. Now that the possibility of studying via IT is becoming more realistic, Kenyan public university library staff need to be trained in virtual librarianship. The African Virtual University Project is a project at its pilot stage. It is financed by the World Bank and aims to use the power of IT to increase access to educational resources throughout sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. At the present time, only Kenyatta University, in Kenya, participates in the African Virtual University project; other public universities may possibly participate in the project in the near future. Librarians should therefore be trained in preparation for serving in the virtual libraries in future. Surprisingly, not all library staff at Kenyatta University have taken advantage of the African Virtual University project to train and be knowledgeable in virtual librarianship.

Performance appraisal

Not all the library staff interviewed and/or observed are involved in staff performance appraisal. This is usually carried out by the university librarians, their deputies and, to a lesser extent, by heads of the various units within the libraries. The impression the author obtained is that the performance appraisal of staff in the Kenyan public university libraries is done haphazardly and in great secrecy. Staff are given blank appraisal forms to sign and the information provided on the forms is not divulged to the person being appraised by the appraiser. "You only come to learn about your poor performance appraisal reports when you are being interviewed for promotion or when you need a recommendation for a job in another institution", one assistant librarian commented.

Staff performance appraisal is definitely not one of the easiest managerial functions, even among experienced managers. Some

managers carry out the task with bias, prejudice, and ill-feelings. This is particularly true in a country like Kenya, where ethnicity and kinship weigh more than one's actual performance. Most staff who were interviewed in the Kenyan public university libraries felt that they are never fairly appraised. They expressed the feeling that their supervisors do not appraise them as well as they deserve. Staff therefore felt that those who appraise them should be trained in performance appraisal techniques and skills to be fair when appraising, free of prejudice, free of bias and allow staff to see what they record on the staff performance appraisal forms before the forms are submitted to the personnel office. An individual's performance appraisal report must not be a secret if he/she is expected to improve on weak areas.

Total quality management (TQM)

This is a commonly-found approach to the management of academic libraries in other regions of the world, but not so in Kenya and in the East African region. Most library staff in the Kenyan public libraries confessed ignorance of the concept. Two out of five university librarians said they knew of TQM as a management concept but which they were not sure of adopting because they did not know what it entailed.

The appropriateness of TQM in service-oriented organisations has been questioned, but Butterwick (1993) sees TQM as a management concept that is particularly appropriate for service organisations. Some of the reasons Butterwick (1993) gives for the appropriateness of TQM in library services include:

- needs and requirements of the customer are paramount;
- there is individual responsibility for quality;
- teamwork is seen to be effective and becomes the norm;
- customer care is top of the agenda;
- customer care is a primary responsibility of all staff;
- internal customers are as important as external customers;
- TQM is, above all, "people-based management".

Training in TQM and adopting the concept would greatly improve the services provided

by the libraries. If TQM is implemented, both the internal customers (employees) and external customers (users) would be better satisfied. Staff who were interviewed, expressed a lot of fear. They expressed fear of losing their jobs, of being retrenched, of not being promoted, of being victimised and generally in fear of the unknown. One important advantage of implementing TQM would be that of driving fear out of library staff. There is also a lack of trust between the staff at different levels. TQM could be an approach to management, which would remove this mistrust. If TQM is introduced, all library staff will need to be trained in how to adapt, implement and apply the concept.

Delegation of authority

The author received the impression that delegation of authority is either not practised at all in some libraries, or rarely or poorly practised in some of the libraries studied. All university librarians interviewed said they occasionally delegate authority to their immediate assistants, but staff in the libraries expressed a different opinion. Library staff gave the impression that senior library staff members behave as if they are scared of delegating authority to their immediate assistants. It was, for instance, alleged in one library, that the librarian normally delegates to junior staff he trusts, rather than delegate to the deputy librarian who is his immediate assistant. Good management practice dictates that an effective manager be able to delegate authority to his or her immediate assistants without fear of being considered lazy or irresponsible.

Even where there is delegation, the authority to make decisions is withheld so that no major decision may be made without the full participation of the university librarian. The inability to delegate keeps university librarians in their offices almost all the time without taking leave: some take only a few days' leave in a year. Even when they are on leave, they have to keep in touch with what is happening in their offices, so they may go to their office for a day or two to carry out some tasks and make some decisions. University librarians and other senior staff in the Kenyan public university libraries need to be trained in how to effectively delegate authority to their assistants without fear of being

undermined or of insubordination. Failure to delegate results in too much work for one individual and inefficiency is almost a certain consequence. Delegation of duties should be viewed positively this may also contribute to the training of potential library managers.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the training needs of library staff in the Kenyan public universities. Library staff may need to be trained and become competent in such areas as information consultancy and brokerage, IT and the social sciences research techniques. Sturges and Neill (1998) see social research techniques as necessary skills required by professional librarians for profiling the community and the boundaries of knowledge which are useful in developing contacts with subject experts able to answer difficult queries or prepare very specialised materials.

IT is the delivery mechanism of the present day in many parts of the world, and it is also expected by many to be the paradigm for the delivery of information in Africa at some stage in the future (Sturges and Neill, 1998). One should, however, not look to the very distant future for this to happen.

Telecommunications and information technology should also be seen as important areas for training.

Financial resources for training

All the university librarians spoke positively about the importance of training staff on the job "if only financial resources were available". When a public university librarian in Kenya talks about financial resources for staff training, he or she is talking of funding provided by the government, or a donor country or donor agency. Some international donor agencies and organisations used to provide financial support for training library and other staff in the Kenyan public universities at one time, but not any more. Examples of agencies and organisations that have funded training include the German Foundation for International Development (Deutsche Stiftung für Entwicklung), British Council, the US Information Services and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Now that such agencies and organisations are no longer so interested in funding training, the only and best alternative left for

the Kenyan public university libraries is to source financial resources from within the universities. There are very many potential financial sources within the universities, which largely remain unexplored. All students in the Kenyan public universities now pay fees. University librarians should request that a certain percentage of the fees paid by every student should be given to the libraries for the purpose of buying information materials and the training of library staff to provide better library services. This has been suggested to university librarians, but they seem not to have pursued its implementation vigorously.

All public university libraries in Kenya have active income-generating units. These services include bookbinding, photocopying, printing, e-mail, and fax. Reading carrels are also rented out to library users who do not like studying in the common-study areas within the libraries. Book repairs are carried out for a fee, a service which extends to members of the public. Overdue fines are charged in all the Kenyan public university libraries. Monies generated from these sources must not be surrendered to the university central administration, as is the current practice. All of these sources can generate considerable funds which could be spent on training library staff.

Mode of training

What mode of training should be adapted for training library staff on the job? A range of different approaches should be adopted; including in-house training, short courses organised within or outside the universities, and attendance of professional local, regional and international conferences and workshops. Professional conferences and workshops are important for professional continuing professional development, but the staff of the Kenyan public universities are never sponsored to attend them. One very unfortunate reality is that whenever there is a donor willing to sponsor one, or maybe two, members of the library staff to attend an international conference or workshop, it is only the university librarian and/or his or her deputy who attend the conference or workshop. This is because a donor would normally communicate with the university librarian and ask him or her to nominate one or two staff members of the library for sponsorship. The university librarian quickly nominates himself or herself and if the

sponsor wishes to sponsor one other staff member, the deputy university librarian may also benefit. This de-motivates library staff, and is not a practice confined to one or a few public university libraries in Kenya.

One library staff member who was interviewed, said, “Any professional conference or workshop, whether held in Kenya or out of Kenya is a preserve of the university librarian”. The SCANUL-ECS 1998 Conference was held in Kenya, at Moi University, between 23 and 26 July 1998. Likewise, SCECSAL-13 Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya, between 27 and 31 July 1998. The two conferences followed each other and attracted prominent practising librarians and trainers from the east, south and central African region. SCECSAL-13 Conference in particular attracted 257 delegates from 13 countries. Both were very educational conferences, but very few library staff from the Kenyan public university libraries attended. This was not because library staff did not see the need of attending the conferences, but rather because they were not sponsored to attend the conferences. There were places for non-member delegates who were able to pay a registration fee.

One wishes that all the Kenyan public university librarians and their deputies could have attended even one of the conferences. During the SCANUL-ECS1998 Conference, for example, the following important observations and recommendations were made regarding “training and impact of skills”:

- training programmes for library and information workers should be geared towards meeting changing job requirements;
- special arrangements should be made for training of trainers to cater for continuous and in-house training;
- special arrangements should be made for continuous education with consultations between trainers and practitioners;
- curricula should be reviewed periodically, through consultations between trainers and practitioners, to reflect changing needs of the environment, bearing in mind international, regional and national outlook;
- there is need for library schools to compare their programmes;
- trainers and practitioners should promote research culture with a view to identifying prevailing problems, needs and conditions, which need to be addressed.

Several other important recommendations and observations were made concerning sustainable financing, IT and the marketing of library and information services and products. All these observations and recommendations would immensely benefit university librarians and other staff in the Kenyan public university libraries. Sponsoring one or two staff members at a time to such educational conferences and workshops need not necessarily be an enormous expense.

Training needs analysis

Before embarking on a programme to train library staff on the job, a thorough training needs analysis must be carried out. All Kenyan public university libraries could do this jointly, or each one might do it individually. The training needs will be generally similar in all the libraries. The training needs analysis should be carried out for the following reasons:

- to identify the actual training needs of the staff of the Kenyan public university libraries;
- to avoid training programmes which might be ill-directed and inadequately focused;
- to provide the framework, tools, techniques, and processes and skills for designing, and implementing efficient, effective, timely and productive training for those library staff who need it most;
- to ensure that the training is designed to meet the training requirements of the library staff.

Conclusion

The issue of continuing training and education for library staff in the Kenyan public university libraries should receive more attention than it does at the present time. Every public university library in Kenya should make an attempt to establish a training unit within the library, which should be charged with the co-ordination of training library staff. Such a unit should also continuously carry out an analysis of the training needs. Library staff in the Kenyan public university libraries need to be prepared to cope with the inevitable and eminent

political, economic, social, technological and other changes which are likely to affect the working environment of librarians. Changes which affect the working environments of librarians are similar the world over.

Hudson (1999) finds it a matter of necessity for library managers to assist staff to cope with the resulting stress and conflict. IT, in particular, has had an impact on the practice of librarianship. A librarian who does not have even the very basic skills in IT may feel useless, unwanted, demoralised, stressed and unproductive. A librarian with these feelings would obviously resist change of any kind. A librarian like this can receive help by being trained in the basic IT skills and be assured that an IT skill is only one of the required skills they need.

Odini (1999) strongly recommends that every employer should provide opportunities for open-ended continuing education for his or her library staff and that this must not be a substitute for a full-time course. On this note, library schools in the East African region should also not be too rigid in their admission requirements if they are to encourage and support continuing library education and training for practising librarians. Flexible admission policies should be adopted. Such policies should take into consideration factors such as a person's experience of practical work, a burning urge for further studies or training, and convenient hours of classes for mature practising library staff. This kind of flexible admission policy is lacking at the present time.

Even the best library school may not be able to predict the kind of skills and competencies which employers may require in the future. For this reason, library managers in the Kenyan public university libraries should provide opportunities for continuing training and education for their staff. Library managers should also encourage their staff to train on the job, so that they can update their skills and competencies in readiness for the inevitable changes which are happening every day.

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