

BUILDING STRONG ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN UGANDA THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA CARNEGIE CPD PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT: Academic libraries are encountering numerous changes due to the emerging information communication technological trends and the ever-changing information-seeking behaviour of their users. For the librarians to effectively implement these trends and remain competitive, they need to be regularly engage in continuing professional development (CPD) activities. The study aimed to find out the factors that influenced the motivation to participate in the University of Pretoria (UP) Carnegie CPD programme and the potential impact on service delivery of the selected academic libraries in Uganda as represented in the programme. The study applied a qualitative research design with an interpretive research approach. Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The sample size of the study included eight Academic Librarians who attended the UP Carnegie CPD programme between 2014 and 2018. Data was collected using face to face semi-structured interviews and electronically using ZOOM (online platform). The findings of this study show that most UP Carnegie CPD participants mainly attended the programme due to its rich content; the hands-on subject coverage and new ICT trends, and the need to build their professional networks. The study also revealed the following challenges that were encountered by the participants during the implementations of the various initiatives drawn from the CPD knowledge and skills: difficulty in managing social media platform, lack of IR back-end support, limited data analysis skills required in providing research support, library users' lack of interest in IL training, limited collaboration between Faculty and Librarians, and technophobia from some library staff who frustrate implementation efforts. The study provides recommendations on how to address these challenges.

KEYWORDS: continuing professional development, academic libraries, Carnegie CPD, ICT, Uganda.

BACKGROUND

With the exponential growth in information communication technologies (ICTs), there have been emerging technological and information trends that have impacted every sphere of academic library services which in return have helped academic libraries to stay atop of their game Kadiri and Adetoro (2012, 25); Cooke (2012, 3); Holmner and Bothma (2018, 559). As a result, the library profession is changing and bringing numerous opportunities to the field. For academic librarians to proficiently utilise these opportunities and keep abreast of the ever-changing trends there is a need to continuously update their knowledge, skills and expertise about the current trends through teaching, sharing experiences, networking, collaborating and mentoring Moonasar and Underwood (2018, 47). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes are helping academic librarians to gain competencies to remain relevant in this digital revolution Cooke (2012, 4).

The University of Pretoria in partnership with the Carnegie Corporation of New York started a CPD Programme with the aim of building capacity for libraries and young academic librarians to adeptly apply current and emerging ICTs to support and enable researchers in Africa. This CPD programme had 10 intakes organised

between 2014-2017 with participants drawn from Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and later Kenya.

The present study presents factors that motivated librarians to participate in the Carnegie CPD programme, from a Uganda academic libraries perspective, as well as the potential impact on service delivery of the selected Ugandan academic libraries in represented in the programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study applied the qualitative research approach with an interpretive research design. This choice was based on the fact presented by Saunders, Dietz, and Thornhill (2014, 644) that interpretive research seeks “to investigate the meanings of words or text as they are expressed within definite social contexts by various participants according to individuals’ previous experiences”. Interpretivism collects small samples, intending to conduct an in-depth qualitative investigation to answer set research objective(s). Therefore interpretive researchers underpin the perceptions of the social actors to make sense of the activities that exist within the defined contexts Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010, 51). Four libraries representing the four regions that participated in the Carnegie CPD between 2014 and 2018 were purposively selected. These libraries included: Makerere University (Central region), Mbarara University of Science and Technology MUST (Western region), Islamic University In Uganda IUIU (Eastern region) and Muni University (Northern region).

Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used to recruit participants based on Kothari, Narayanan, and Devi (2014, 78) where the first subject is recruited and then he/she provides multiple referrals. This was adopted since it was the most reliable method of identifying participants in some of the regions under study. The first respondent was from Makerere University Library who then provided more referrals for the study. Interviews were conducted until saturation was realised. The sample size included eight academic librarians who attended the UP Carnegie CPD between 2014 and 2018. Four were from Makerere University, one from IUIU, one from MUST and two from Muni University. Participation in the study was voluntary, with individual permission sought and participants given all the required details regarding the study objectives. Emphasis on the freedom to respond was highlighted as well as the assurance of protection, confidentiality and ethical use of data collected. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted for respondents in the geographical reach and online video conferencing using Zoom for those out of physical reach. These were recorded, transcribed, sorted, and tabulated using MS excel sheet, and categorised under various themes to create the research findings and basis of discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were thematically presented as follows: information on the programme, motivational factors, CPD content, applicability of knowledge and skills, challenges encountered, recommendations, impact to service delivery and willingness to attend other CPDs

Information about the programme

Most participants learnt about the UP Carnegie CPD programme through referral by colleagues who had previously attended the programme. One participant shared that he used to receive updates as an alumnus of the UP Carnegie Masters of Information and Technology (MIT) through the alumni Facebook platform. Others learnt about the programme through their University Librarians and the Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA) website. This finding agrees with an earlier study by Moonasar and Underwood (2018, 53) that emphasizes the need for professional associations in highlighting CPD initiatives to their members.

Motivational factors

The participants were asked to mention the factors that motivated them to attend the programme. The majority were drawn by the practicability of the ICT based course content, and the need to update and

improve service delivery. This finding agrees with Cossham and Fields (2013, 238) who reported that with the rapidly changing ICT there is need for librarians to keep abreast of the latest trends. Others wanted to enhance their knowledge and skills as noted by one participant; findings also revealed that the need to update skills was another motivational factor. As one interviewee said;

“..the content on the CPD website specified the things we do here like user education (IL), digitization, social media which had also become an important tool in libraries as marketing platforms...the content was a match with what we were doing in the library although we had limited knowledge about all this, therefore, I thought attending CPD would equip me with all that information that would improve service delivery”

This supports the findings of Aslam (2017, 1) who noted that librarians must review their skills and knowledge to meet the current requirement of the profession to work in the academic libraries of the 21st century.

Respondents also cited the opportunity to network and share experiences with other professionals from different countries. As noted by a particular respondent; *“...participating in the programme would open up my career horizon to connect with international professions”*.

This corroborates with Alawadhi (2015, 89) who asserts that during CPDs, participants build beneficial networks which in return helps them to gain an understanding of library issues that impact positively on service delivery.

Fulfilling the expectations

The study sought to find out whether the participants' expectations of the CPD programme were fulfilled. Most participants agreed that their expectations for the CPD programme were met. Emphasis was drawn to digitisation and handling of documents for longtime archiving, Information Literacy (IL), Institutional Repositories (IR), designing QR codes, social media management, building new networks of professionals from participating countries and marketing and how to use collaborative platforms as illustrated by one of the interviewees' responses below:

“From the skills and knowledge gained from the programme, I was added on the Information Literacy (IL) team... I was also put in charge of the library social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) ...before CPD when digitizing we did not know to crop or clean documents but with the CPD skills, one can think our scanned documents were born digital and lastly we were introduced to reference management so I can transfer this knowledge”.

One respondent was however dissatisfied with the little time allocated for the visit to the digitization unit, hence getting little hands-on with the UP machines. This particular respondent noted that:

“We had many practical sessions but given that I work in the digitisation unit, I thought I would get a full day in the UP digitisation unit and work with their machines...”

Participants gained knowledge and skills that enhanced service delivery in their institutions. This implies that the CPD programme was able to fulfil most of the participants' expectations.

Ability to apply the knowledge obtained from CPD

Regarding whether the participants had applied any learned skills and gained knowledge from the CPD programme, all interviewees indicated that they had been able to apply one aspect or the other. This included:

Institutional Repositories (IR); Social media for communication; Information Literacy training; Digitization and collaborative platforms for research.

Respondents have also used the acquired knowledge at their work stations as noted in the following comments:

"...by that time my institution had started exploring dSpace, therefore the training came in handy"

"...I was also put in charge of the library social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter)...with the CPD skills, one can think our scanned documents were born digital and lastly, we were introduced to reference management so I can transfer this knowledge".

This could partly be attributed to the fact that the use of social media for communication does not require a lot of funds to implement, and also the fact that the programme was for young professionals who could easily adapt to the use of technology. This new technology would help academic libraries to enhance their visibility and easily communicate with their users. The same findings were reflected in Chu and Du (2013, 66) study that social media tools helped enhance library services and interaction with students.

Additionally, the participants had taken up the role of research support to the library users. This could be attributed to the fact that library users are now appreciating the relevance of librarians; these professionals have shown that they possess enormous knowledge and skills needed in smoothing the research process. Another important revelation was on a personal basis as the participants had been able to use collaborative platforms for research and some had already published papers with colleagues from other countries in peer-reviewed journals. This was highly emphasised by Sprunger (2017) that research is more effective when researchers from different areas collaborate on a project of mutual interest. Implementation of knowledge attained can be attributed to the enthusiasm by participants to impart the knowledge and skills acquired from CPD to both the library staff and users.

However, the study revealed that one library had not implemented the IR. This could be attributed to the long development process an IR goes through from designing an IR policy to hosting it on the web.

Impact of CPD to service delivery

Respondents confirmed that the CPD programme positively influenced their service delivery. This was evident, firstly, in the confidence exhibited when providing services to the library users; secondly, several participants have been able to build and run their IR to showcase their research output which in turn has boosted their webometrics rankings; thirdly, the libraries can easily engage with their users through the numerous social media platforms created by the CPD participants; and lastly, the study revealed that the participants' mindset towards works changed,

After attending this CPD programme they had become more self-driven, and they developed an interest in research and keeping abreast of the latest trend. These findings corroborate with Bowen-Chang and Hosein (2019, 98) who noted that CPDs are a payoff because of the benefits attained liked competence, career advancement and job satisfaction.

Willingness to attend another CPD

When asked if they would be willing to attend another CPD, an overwhelming number indicated that they would mainly because of their interest in CPD especially with the content on trending ICTs in library, publishing, technical management of library systems, consultancy services, RDM and data analysis. This may

be because technology keeps changing and that librarians as information workers need to keep abreast with most of it because as noted by Jerry and Ramasesh (2011) ICT and its tools play a huge role in disseminating information services.

However, one participant was not willing to attend another CPD. This could partly be attributed to the fact that the participant had already attended too many CPD's and it felt like it was a repetition of what he already knew. This contradicts Moonasar and Underwood (2018, 49) findings, which notes that librarians should regularly engage in CPDs to maintain professional knowledge and competence in a profession that is constantly evolving.

Challenges encountered while implementing ideas and knowledge

In discussing the challenges that have burred some CPD participants from implementing ideas learnt during the programme, the majority cited a lack of management support from both the university and the library. This could be attributed to top management fronting other priorities besides the library. Additionally, some library managers are yet to appreciate technology, and this explains the difficulties in embracing and financing innovations. This is in agreement with Shehzad, Sajjad, and Ijaz (2019) who assert that at times library management may not know the value of some ideas learnt during CPDs hence hindering apportioning of relevant funds for implementation.

Another challenge encountered was the lack of other library staff's support for the new ideas. This could be because some of them have never attended any CPDs and therefore they have different mindsets. They did not appreciate the innovations and they were not willing to participate in their implementation.

Furthermore, some participants indicated difficulties in the management of social media platforms. This could be attributed to the fact that the participants were overwhelmed with the ordinary office work and managing these library social media accounts simultaneously.

Additionally, the study revealed that those participants who had implemented IR complained about lack of back-end support for their IR projects. This could be attributed to the fact that the participants lacked the necessary IT skills and knowledge to manage this new project.

The study further revealed that some library users were not interested in attending IL training regardless of its importance. This could be because some users do not know the value of IL and therefore they do not see the essence of attending. Another reason frustrating IL maybe because of minimum collaboration between Faculty and Librarians. This is in line with Yousef (2010) observation that faculty members lack collaboration in their culture.

CONCLUSION

This paper established the value of the University of Pretoria Carnegie CPD Programme towards building strong academic libraries and library professionals in Uganda. It is no doubt that many participants greatly benefited from the programme and owing to their participation, they were able to implement, transfer knowledge and recommend more librarians to attend such programmes. Learning from a local proverb attributed to the Baganda (the largest tribe in Central Uganda): *"When the white ants change the direction of flight, you must change your trap too"*, so that you can be able to harvest them. The librarian should keep evolving with and learning from the ongoing evolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are in accordance with the challenges encountered by the participants in the implementation of the knowledge and skills learnt from the UP Carnegie CPD.

- The Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA) should formulate policies and procedures to promote the participation of all academic librarians in the CPDs. This will necessitate them to keep abreast of the new trends hence support the new library innovations.
- Institutional management should prioritize the library by increasing its budget allocation. This will help in purchasing equipment for the new library projects and recruit more human resources.
- The academic librarians need to forge a partnership with the Faculty by working together; this partnership can be in the form of teaching and research. This will improve collaboration and help in embracing new library projects or services by Faculty and students.
- Librarians should aggressively market IL to Faculty by sharing the relevance of having IL competent Students and Faculty. This will help to increase the numbers of participants.

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