Effectiveness of Library Practicum in linking theory and practice: case of the of University of Zambia and Mulungushi University Libraries

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ABSTRACT: Library practical training is a supervised, hands- on practice in various library duties and functions. This paper explores the effectiveness of library practical training in linking theory and practice. The study used a survey method in which a questionnaire was the main data collection tool. Third year students from the Department of Library and Information Science on practical training during the 2018/19 academic year participated in the study. A sample size of 110 respondents was purposively selected. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The results revealed that practical training was a very effective and highly relevant educational experience appreciated by students and lived up to their expectations in linking theory and practice. Inadequate practical training duration, overcrowding of students in one institution due to the limited places for attachments in other institutions and a general lack of motivational incentives in most host institutions were the main challenges reported by respondents. This study is the first of its kind on library practicum in Zambia. It is hoped that the findings will be helpful in designing enhanced and more effective library practical training programs in Zambia as well as in other developing countries.

KEYWORDS: Library and Information Science, Library practical training, University of Zambia Library, Mulungushi University Library, Zambia

I.   INTRODUCTION

Industrial attachment in libraries is a field- based, supervised, professional learning experience that takes place in a library setting. The epitome of library practical training is to let the students go through a variety of tasks and learning experiences in a range of library operations such as acquisition, cataloging, circulation, reference, special collection public services and the like. It provides students an opportunity to apply the theoretical learning of the classroom in real- world settings. The library profession has evolved from mere apprenticeship or vocational training to an academic discipline coupled with practical training. This study investigates the effectiveness of library practical training in linking theory and practice in Zambia with a focus on the University of Zambia (UNZA) and Mulungushi University Libraries.

II.   CONTEXTUAL SETTING

The study reviews the effectiveness of library practicum at UNZA and Mulungushi University libraries. Both institutions have had a deliberate policy of hosting Library and Information Science (LIS) students from UNZA to participate in the institutions' programs through practical training. In so doing it has been contributing to the modelling of students, for instance by exposing them to the true work environment where they are engaged in various Library work tasks. During the period of attachments, students are encouraged to take advantage of the training period to gain as much work experiences as they can. Therefore, the library's role in leadership development does not only focus on its own staff but also on students that are preparing to go into the library work environment. At third year, it is a requirement for all LIS students to undergo a six week or twelve week practical training in library work. The practical training has since become an integral component of library information science (LIS) academic program at UNZA. In view of this, it is important to stress that the type of LIS graduates produced will have a great bearing on the future of Librarianship. Furthermore, Library personnel are drivers of the profession and the decisions they make will have great impact on society. This is because Librarians are responsible for acquiring, organizing and disseminating of information to society.

Statement of the problem: There is no doubt that library practical training programs are a laudable skills development programme, geared towards bridging the gap between theories learnt in the class and the actual practice. However, despite the importance of library practicum in professional development of students, there is scanty or no literature on the effectiveness of library training in Zambia.

To date no documentation of the effectiveness of library training in Zambia has been reported. Due to this gap in knowledge, little is known about the eeffectiveness of library practical training in linking theory and practice. It is against this background that this study was conducted.

Objectives of the study : The main objective of the study was to investigate effectiveness of library practical training in linking theory and practice. Specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the effectiveness of practical training in linking theory with practice,
2. Identify the challenges associated with the students' industrial attachment programme
3. Recommend practical strategies for the effective implementation of the practical training programme.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Almost every occupation attaches great significance to practical training. Librarianship is no exclusion. Dodge and Mc Keough (2003) argue that education without practical application would not sufficiently equip a person to work effectively in a trade or profession. In the opinion of Hacker (1987), the issue of theory versus practice has been of concern for long time by Library education experts.

Karunaratne and Perera (2015) are of the view that industrial training provides students with significant benefits in career preparation and income and also strengthens their self-confidence and self-satisfaction in the lifelong learning process. Similarly, Ezeali and Esiagu (2009) opines that training is an organized, coordinated development of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by an industrial worker to master a given situation or perform a certain task within an organization setting. They further stressed that training should not limited to work environment is necessary. This implies that the knowledge base of the Practitioner increases in Proportion to the training acquired. A study by Ogheneruemu (2007) at Delta State University to evaluate the effectiveness of the library practicum program found that LIS students thought the time spent on the practicum was worthwhile.

Nevertheless, while it is recognized that industrial training is a viable avenue through which LIS students can gain valuable competencies and skills, often times the programme is loaded with challenges that tend to affect its effectiveness. Olabiyi, Okarfor and Peter (2012) identify the following as challenges to the effectiveness of industrial training in Nigeria: absence of approved job specification for the courses, inadequate participation of students in skill acquiring projects and poor supervision of students. Other barriers include shortness of the industrial training period which makes it difficult for trainees to have sufficient industry exposure (Karunaratne & Perera, 2015); unfriendliness of industry workers towards trainees, who for fear of losing their jobs to trainees are unwilling to provide in-depth training to them (Bukaliya, 2012).

A number of strategies that could enhance library practicum have also been identified. Kuranaretne and Perera (2015) posit that industrial training will yield the expected result if training is channelled to developing trainees' skills by exposing them to creativity based learning projects and presentation skills, team work activities and managerial skills results. To that end, Ugwuanyi and Ezema (2010) emphasize the need for LIS professionals in libraries to constantly engage in re-tooling especially in ICT. Bukaliya (2012) add that the industrial training period should not be too short if trainees are to benefit maximally from it. In fact, respondents in a study by Mihail (2006) were of the view that the training period should range between six and nine months instead of three months. The foregoing indicates that the subject of industrial training by students of LIS is not a new one.

III.   METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was adopted in this research work. Questionnaire was the instruments used for collecting data to establish the effectiveness of library practical training in linking theory and practice in Zambia. The data collection instrument comprised both closed and open ended questions. Therefore, the study was largely quantitative in nature. The study population comprised 220 3rd year students on practical training for the academic year 2018/19. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 110 respondents. Out of the 110 respondents, 60 did their practical training at UNZA Library while 50 were at Mulungushi University Library. The data gathered we reanalysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Data collection took place in July 2019 while data analysis was carried out in August 2019.

IV.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate : A total of 100 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to students on library practical training at the University of Zambia library and at Mulungushi library. Out of that number, 97 questionnaires

were returned giving a response rate of 97%. Fifteen questionnaires were received from Mulungushi library. However, out of the total number of the returned questionnaires, 7 questionnaires were discarded because they were either incomplete or had too many inconsistencies. Hence, there were only 90 questionnaires useful for data analysis.

Table 1: Response rate

Library	Distributed questionnaires	Retrieved questionnaires	Spoiled questionnaires
UNZA Library	60	65	6
Mulungushi varsity Library	40	32	1
	100	97	7

Background information of the respondents : This section covers the general information on the characteristics of the respondents' in terms of their gender, age, year of study and name of institution the training was done from. Out of a total of 90 respondents, 53% were male while 47% were female. The finding suggests that there were more male respondents who were trained by the two institutions than the female respondents. In terms of age, 35 respondents were aged 21-25 years, 23 respondents were between 15-20 years, 15 were aged between 26-30 years, 12 were between 31-35 years and 3 were above 36 years while 2 did not respond. Table one therefore indicates that majority of the respondents were within 21-25 years age range.

Table 2: Age of respondents

	Characteristic	frequency	%
Gender	Male	32	53.3
	Female	28	47.7
	Total	90	100.0
Age		17	28.3%
	15-20	23	25.5%
	21-25	35	38.8%
	26-30	15	16.6%
	31-35	12	13.3%
	36 and above	3	3.3%
	No response	2	2.2%
	Total	90	100.0

Effectiveness of practical training in linking theory with practice : It was felt necessary to ask the respondents to rate the effectiveness of the training they received. 88 respondents answered this question and table 2 shows that 46 (51.1%) of the respondents reported that the training was very effective, 3 (3%) reported that the training was quite effective and 38 (42.2%) reported that the training was effective. This finding seems to suggest that the training the students received was very effective. The finding agrees with the findings of the study by Ogheneruemu (2007) that the time the students spend on practicum was useful. The findings also show that majority of the students gained practical knowledge in the core areas of their field of study and that will have a positive effect on their performance in their future place of work, and job on might not be there.

Table 2: Effectiveness of the training in learning professional skills

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Very effective	46	51.1
Quite effective	3	3.3
Effective	38	42.2
Not effective	0	0
Not sure	0	0

Views and expectations of students regarding practical training

This section presents the findings of the study on the feelings and expectations of the students regarding the training. When the respondents were asked to indicate what they were exposed to during their training, the respondents indicated that they were exposed to all library routine work as well as technical activities such as cataloguing and classification, acquisition, serials management, and reference services. This shows that majority of the students had a positive view of their library practicum and as such they were fully absorbed in areas related to their field of study. Because the students were attached to libraries, most of the experience acquired in the libraries will actually prepare them for actual work situation.

Importance of practical training in improving professional skills of students : It was felt essential to discover from the respondents whether the training they received was important to them. Majority (97%) of the respondents agreed that the training they received in the respective libraries they were attached to was important while (3%) did not respond. In terms of the extent to which the practical training was important to them in improving their professional skills, (44%) of the respondents indicated that the practical training was extremely important, (36%) of the respondents indicated that the practical training was very important and (18%) indicated that the practical training was important while (2%) indicated that the training was somewhat important. Generally, these findings suggest that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience with practicum providing the opportunity for resolving conflicts between the practice and theory; concepts and experience.

Moreover, it was critical for the respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that practical training provided a link between theory and practice. 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that practical training provided a link between theory and practice, (38%) of the respondents agreed while (3%) and (2%) strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. This finding seems to suggest that an important part of any training is the process of reflecting on what has been observed and experienced. The findings agree with Sididiqui's (1992) findings that introduction of internship for newly qualified librarians help them to develop positive attitudes, and in obtaining jobs more easily.

Table 4: Specific areas in which knowledge was gained during training

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Discipline	10	11.1
Cataloguing & classification skills	17	18.8
Time management skills	14	15.5
Professional knowledge acquisition	15	16.6
Computer application	8	8.8
Reference service	6	6.6

Table 4 above shows the specific areas in which the respondents felt practical training played a key role in developing their professional skills. 8 (20%) of the respondents gained knowledge in the area of shelving and shelf-reading of books, 17 (18.8%) stated the area of cataloguing and classification, 17 (18.8%) in the area of circulation duties, 17 (18.8%) mentioned the area of serials management, and 17 (18.8%) stated the area of acquisition. Some respondents 15 (16.6%) gained knowledge in professional knowledge acquisition while 14(15.5%) of the respondents gained knowledge in time management. 10 (11.1%) of the respondents gained knowledge in application of theory and 10 (11.1%) of the respondents gained knowledge in the area of discipline. Other respondents gained knowledge in other areas.

Challenges associated with the students' industrial attachment programme : When asked whether they faced any challenges during their training, majority (58%) agreed that they faced certain challenges during their training while (42%) disagreed. It was important for the respondents to indicate some of the challenges which they faced.

Table 5: Challenges faced by the respondents during their training

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of motivational incentives	26	28.8
Long duration of the training	37	41.1
Short duration of the training	2	2.2
Lack of training tools	10	11.1
Non-cooperative attitudes between staff and students	20	22.2
Lack of proper coordination/supervision	23	25.5
Overcrowding of students in one place	31	34.4
Rigidness of training program	12	13.3

Table 5 above shows that most respondents 37 (41.1%) complained about the length of the training period, 31(34.4%) complained about crowding of students in one institution due to the limited places for attachments in other institutions, 26 (28.8%) complained about lack of motivational incentives such as allowances, 23 (25.5%) complained about lack of proper coordination/supervision on the part of staff that trained them, and 20 (22.2%) complained about non-cooperative attitudes between staff and students. Other respondents 12 (13.3%) complained about the rigidness of the training programme while 10 (11.1%) of the respondents complained about lack of adequate training tools. The analysis shows that the major limitations to the actualization of the objectives of the training programme were, long duration of the training, crowding of students in libraries such as the university of Zambia library due to limited places for attachments in other institutions and lack of motivational incentives such as a token of appreciation by hosting institutions.

Practical strategies for the effective implementation of the practical training programme : It was deemed important to find out from the respondents whether they agreed with the suggestions for the effective implementation of the practical training programme. Majority of the respondents (87%) agreed with the suggestion that efforts should be made to ensure that students attached to an organization were properly supervised to ensure that what they were doing was in line with the objectives of the Library and Information Science programme while (3%) did not respond. Further, (88%) of the respondents also agreed with the suggestion that the Library and Information Science Department and the libraries involved in the management of the training programmes should liaise ahead of time so as to minimize the high level of refusal to accept students for their industrial training participation while (2%) did not respond. 70% of the respondents disagreed with the suggestion that the Library and Information Science Department should explore and identify more suitable organisations where students should be attached to for their training while (30%) agreed. This finding suggests that the students prefer looking for institutions of their choice for their library practicum as opposed to being attached to institutions identified by the department.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Library practicum should be viewed as an important strategy to expose trainees to real life situations and to equip them with the necessary skills so that they would be job ready when they graduate. This research confirmed what has generally been reported elsewhere that practical training provides a highly relevant educational experience that is appreciated by students. In addition, it provides those who are new to the industry with an avenue to acquire invaluable skills and knowledge which can then be integrated into their electronic portfolio which increasingly are becoming seen as a major key in unlocking the job market.Indeed practical training has become an integral component of the Library and Information Science (LIS) academic program at both UNZA Library and at Mulungushi University Library and as such linking theory and practice is the essence of this practicum. The aim is to expose students to a variety of tasks and learning experiences in a range of library operations such as acquisition, cataloguing, circulation duties, indexing and abstracting, shelving and shelf-reading etc.

In line with these findings, the following recommendations are proffered:
- Institutions should provide logistics and administrative support to students on attachment.
- Supervision of students on attachment must be done early so that supervisors can make suggestions to the industries early.

- Need for orientation of prospective employers to fully appreciate their role in the student's academic development

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