New trends in library and information fields and the implications for continuing education

I. M. N. KIGONGO-BUKENYA

Abstract

Lists and describes the major trends in the library and information profession, including: changing environment; agitation from employers, associations, students and users; new technology, transparency with which information is communicated; differentiation in the profession; special groups; internationalization; interdisciplinarianism; and harmonization. Considers the implications of these trends for the achievement of the objectives of continuing education both in general and in the Eastern and Southern Region of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The library and information scenario is under constant change, upheaval and revolution today. The roles and challenges for information professionals are greater and could be summarized thus: 'information professionals must be 'contingent' meaning that their orientation, skills and techniques must be 'the best fit' to measure to the ever changing information society needs'. Brittain (1989) warns: If one does not attempt wholeheartedly to take on new skills, even ones which may seem faddish, the danger is that library and information science graduates and indeed schools, will be squeezed out of the future by practitioner of avowedly high tech subjects like computer science and human factors. Even the more traditional skills such as management and marketing are being increasingly useful and again graduates from these disciplines could keep library and information students out of IT – related users in which such skills are valuable.

Several authors have studied the effect of change in the role of the information professional. In her articles: 'The changing role of the information professional and its implications for library and information education' (1979) and 'Information transforming society: challenges for the

Year 2000 (1992), Toni Carbo Bearman, Dean of SLIS, University of Pittsburgh, identified trends which call in their trail appropriate adjustments and enrichment to curricular. Other works like Michael Buckland's (1982)'Education for information management; Michael Brittain's (1989) 'Curriculum development for information science to meet the needs of information industries in the 1990s'; Lester Asheim's (1970) 'New trends in the curriculum of library schools'; Dosa's (1986) 'Education for new professional roles in the information society'; L. Vagiano's (1992) 'Information science: a house built on sand'; S.A. Wolpert's (1977) 'The information manager of the future'; and R.J. Summit's 'Problems and challenges in the information society - the next 20 years', all conclude with the inevitability of change which demands a new breed of information professionals.

TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE BREED OF INFORMATION PROFESSIONS

What are the trends?

Developments showing persistence, consistency or prevalence in library and information fields have been baptized by the name 'Trends'. Trends are symptoms of societal change calling in their trails transformation of the status quo to meet the predominant needs of society of the day. Trends are important because they pinpoint developments in society to which library and information services must address themselves if they were to play a useful role in society. Trends are the more important in library and information fields because they point to the evolving characteristics in society for which appropriate information professionals must be produced. Areview of these trends is made below.

Changing environment

These involve social, political and economic aspects and are apparently the 'Mother of all trends'. Social aspects have caused consuming habits; demographic, cultural and political aspects have caused ideological, international relations, and religious changes; while economic aspects have generated inflationary, dwindling budgets and global competition changes. Due to these changes, society has had to adjust appropriately.

Agitation from employers/associations/students/users

Whenever institutions have tended to lag behind change and to respond to society's new needs, the result has been the trend 'agitation' from Employers/Associations demanding better quality professionals, users demanding better services, and students demanding courses to meet the market demand.

Technology

Information technology and telecommunication has brought a revolutionary way of information acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval and transmission. Consequently appropriate courses have cropped up viz: database development / management, networks management, online retrieval, and others.

Transparency

In consequence of the technological manner through which information is transmitted and received, the information worker's role as an intermediary has lessened, and the user has direct access through self interrogation of databases.

There is therefore increased transparency. This transparency has caused concern about 'Ethics' of information – particularly in respect of privacy, censorship and intellectual freedom and copyright.

Diferentiation in the professions

Differentiation has been on the upsurge as a result of special interests in study and research. In the library and information profession alone you would find: special librarians, school media centre specialists, archivists and systems analysists to mention but a few. The same developments have occurred in medicine, law and other professions. In all of these professions information organization and access is vital. So there has been a demand for mounting of specialists courses to cater for those areas of specialist professions.

Special groups

Many special groups have sprung up, for example:

- the handicapped

- the aged

- The disadvantaged, like illiterates, the poor in the inner cities or rural areas.

Efforts have been made, therefore, to produce information professionals with inclination and skills to identify special group information needs and to provide such required information

Internationalization

The world is now a global village. What happens in the USA is instantly transmitted around the world; a decision on the Middle East could affect the whole world. Due to political, economic or social reasons immigrants are common in many countries as professionals move and work in different countries. To cope with the situation, efforts have been taken to internationalize education and to ensure equivalence and reciprocity of qualifications and experience for the benefit of mankind.

Interdisciplinarinism

Co-existence and interrelationship between disciplines is now the practice of the day. Therefore library and information scientists co-operate with education, psychology, political, computer, telecommunication and law schools in offering their programmes.

Harmonization

Hitherto librarians, archivists, and information specialists received different study programmes and regarded themselves as different from each other. In order to promote unity and enhance the status of the profession, and above all because all the above three handle information, the teaching and training has now been harmonized.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE)

The implication of these trends is that there must be changes in the current curricular, and that future curricular must be constructed in such manner as to accommodate programmes that will equip graduate professionals with the knowledge, skills and techniques to acquire, organize and disseminate information according to the new demands in the information market. For the professionals in the field already, CE programmes must be mounted to update them and adjust their concept and performance according to the new information market demands. The only way the information professionals could fight 'poachers in the information game park' is through keeping abreast with information technology and grow proficient in its operation.

Continuing education defined

Continuing education has multiple meanings, one meaning being: any education beyond the initial professional qualification, regardless of form. Another meaning excludes work for advanced degrees and refers only to activities that are more limited in their focus and duration, though still formally organized. The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science gave the following characteristics of continuing education:

• Implication of life-long learning

• Updating a persons education

• Diversification to a new area within a field

• Assumption that the individual has the basic responsibility for his/her own development

• Involvement and education activities beyond those considered necessary for entrance into the field.

Noragh Jones (1977) interpreted continuing education in its widest possible sense and defined CE as all those ties after the initial qualification in librarianship which contribute to ongoing learning, whether on job, within employing library, or provided by outside bodies such as library association or library schools. It includes programmes leading to formal qualifications as well as the informal meetings, short courses and conferences, the outcome of which is not formally assessed and where participation is more voluntary.

Objectives of continuing education

There appears to be no quarrel with the virtues, necessity or objectives of CE. For instance Houle and McGlothlin are in basic agreement about the main objectives of continuing education:

• Keeping up with new knowledge of the profession

• Adjusting to new conceptions of the profession

• Continuing to study the basic supporting discipline of the profession

• Personal development or growth as an individual, not just as a professional.

Asheim (1988) expresses that continuing education is important to the professional for the following reasons. First, to keep as an informed citizen by making use of a wide range of non-librarianship experiences; second, keeping up with data professionally especially when promotion or change of a job to specialization in unfamiliar areas; third, learning new techniques in order to keep up with provisional demands and to be able to supervize the work; fourth, keeping up to-date psychologically, that is, cultivating a flexible attitude to change, an openness of view point which enables one to discriminate in a rapidly changing profession.

This could either mean broadening one's outlook and breaking resistance to change or the development of a more critical attitude to what is new.

In the USA, the American Library Association (ALA) is responsible for the promotion and provision of CE for library and information personnel. According to ALA philosophy (1967) CE is a learning process which builds on and updates previously acquired knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes of the individual. ALA recognizes the maintenance of competence via CE as a professional ethics imperative. The ALA Council adopted 'Guidelines for quality in continuing education for information, library and media personnel' on January 12, 1988. ALA promotes personnel policies and practices which:

- incorporate CE and staff development;

- meets members' learning needs not only through its publications, its conferences, and its workshops, but also through the development of learning packages and its learning resource clearing house;

- co-operates and co-ordinates efforts with other providers of CE;

- monitors needs;

- stimulates planning for comprehensive, sequential CE opportunities through its chapters;

- encourages funding for CVE at State and Local level and through its legislative programmes;

- presses for Federal funding for CE scholarships, research and model CE development.

Who should provide continuing education and to whom?

Deans of schools' opinions vary on the extent to which schools should provide CE and for whom they should do so. Despite efforts by library education leadership, library schools have not assumed a clear role in CE. Notwithstanding, most schools have made some efforts in CE, if only for the sake of their relationship with practising professionals, who have exerted pressure in schools to provide continuing opportunities. As early as 1967. Houle wrote:'The university professional schools have recently given serious thought to their distinctive roles in CE'.

He indicated their chief responsibility as 'to prepare the preservice student for his later learning'. For practitioners, most school faculties agree that they should focus on hard task, the kind of education which is basic, fundamental, and ordinarily presented in a series of sessions or a period of residency. Schools have designed various programmes to meet CE needs, for instance: research leading to higher degrees (MA, MPhil. in UK and PhD, in UK, USA); taught courses leading to higher degree – MLS, MInfSc, specialist advanced certificates, studies allowing for post master specialization; short courses not leading to further qualification but intended to keep librarians up to-date or enable them specialize to a certain level. Other avenues include conferences, seminars, workshops and clinics.

The present first professional programme for the library and information professionals is so crowded that there is hardly time to teach the students all that is required.

There is also the fact that we must contemplate constant change and therefore while CE should provide avenues for the professional to advance in knowledge and practice, the major lesson of CE is to expect that the unexpected will happen. The practitioner therefore must constantly be updated to changes. This is why CE occupies the place it does in the curriculum today.

PRESENT STATE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN REGION

In situations predominant in Africa, many of the library and information centres are run by unqualified personnel. Courses are monitored to improve their performance, many a time these courses have been mistaken to be CE, this is false. CE presupposes prior qualifications which are followed by training programmes with the view of improving on what is already acquired, updating it or availing new knowledge and techniques demanded by the changing environment. In the Eastern and Southern Africa Region many countries have no national library schools offering basic professional qualifications. Training therefore is obtained in neighbouring countries. For example, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana or from developed countries like UK, USA, Europe and others. This in itself presents a different set of problems since much of what is learnt abroad might not fit the local needs. Where national training facilities in library and information science exist however, programmes are offered at para-professional level like the Certificate in Library and Information Studies (Uganda) or Library Assisting Certificate (Kenya, Botswana, Zimbabwe); at undergraduate level like in Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe where a Bachelors Degree is offered; at postgraduate or masters level like in Uganda and Ethiopia; and at Post-Masters level like MPhil. and PhD mainly offered in Nigeria, UK or USA.

The nature of plans

Regarding the question whether there are deliberate plans for CE in the areas studied, the predominant view is that many of such courses are 'ad hoc' 'haphazard' and 'irregular'.

Elizabeth A. Padmore (1991) writes:

'Hence it is clear that the current position of Continuing Education in Zimbabwe is extremely patchy, sporadic and uncoordinated. Commenting on the same issue, Andrew M. Kaniki agrees: 'most CE programmes in Zambia are very short irregular and haphazard.' The same passes for Uganda, Kenya and many other countries in the region.

Who organizes the course?

Regarding the question who organizes these programmes the answer is overwhelming that it is "the training institutions (library schools, departments or faculties) and the professional library associations which either singly or jointly organize and run the programmes. In many cases external organizations like the BC (British Council), DSE (German Foundation for International Development), Unesco, DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency), NORAD (Norwegian Development Agency), IDRC (International Development Research Council), AMREF (African Medical Research Foundation), and the WHO (World Health Organization) have, in collaboration with library schools, organized, ran and funded the programmes. Syed A. Abidi and J.B. Ojiambo confirm the above view.

Continuing education priority areas

Regarding the areas which CE should consider a priority in offering programmes, 'an experts meeting' enlists the following changes facing library and information centres, and which major areas should therefore be dealt with:

- information technology

- information management

- strategic information

- modern records management

- management, the African perspective

- information marketing

- publishing as a mode of acquisition.

The content of programmes should derive from the above areas and should be conceived for the following levels.

Top management cadres

a) Control of external environment in which the information scientist is working (pro-active management):

- ways of obtaining background information on the management and administration of present organizations;

- negotiations skills, ability to lobby and get ones voice heard by the influential decision makers;

- public relations and marketing of services: ability to sensitize colleagues about presence of the library/information centre and its relevance to their work;

- management of situations, ability to manage crisis/ conflict situations;

- ability to take advantage of information generated outside the library and using it to strengthen the information base.

b) Management and use of information technology. This would differ according to work and background level but should involve:

- computer appreciation, top management need to be trained in the potential of the computer;

- project formulation and management as far as IT is concerned, ability to specify what one wants;

- knowledge of software and hardware so as to be able to influence decision regarding computer introduction and integration into the system;

- awareness of what the computers would involve and how their use would affect the planning procedures and total operation of the organization.

Operations levels

a) Management and use of information technology:

- awareness of the potential of the computer in library operations;

- training of the key people who would operate the computer, so that they can make proper decisions on what to do with them and put them to proper use;

- familiarization of staff with computers in general to dispel their fear of the computer.

b) Creation and dissemination of information.

Areas to be given special consideration include:

- design of and physical production of information material, library guides, information bulletins and reports etc;

- repackaging of information into different suitable formats and packages – talking books/cassettes, braille etc;

- desk-top publishing.

Other areas

a) For top management:

- decision making;

- management systems;

- personnel management, assessing and training;

- financing and budgeting;

- leadership;

- planning library buildings;

- networking and co-operation;

- policies formulation;

- project development, designing and evaluation;

- statistics and report writing;

- research methods;

- updating status of librarians.

b) Operation level staff:

- user needs assessment;

- collection development;

- information processing;

- use services - networking co-operation;

- statistics and report writing;

- research methods;

- training;

- user education;

- measurement and evaluation of services;

- personnel management;

- extension services and extra-mural work;

- public relations - marketing;

- communication skills;

- audio-visuals;

- preservation and conservation;

- security.

The philosophy behind CE programmes in LIS is that change is inevitable and should be reciprocated by library and information professionals with knowledge, skills and techniques to respond.

THE FUTURE PROBLEMS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

The survey of the current situation of CE in the foregone paragraphs clearly reveal the problems in this area. These include:

- lack of regular CE programmes undertaken by schools, faculties or departments of library and information science;

- lack of teaching facilities for example equipment and materials for CE programmes;

- lack of personnel to plan, execute and evaluate the programme;

- lack of knowledge of users' needs and therefore the subsequent failure to draw appropriate plans to produce programmes to meet the needs;

- lack of co-ordinated efforts in CE programmes;

- lack of clear policy in CE programmes;

- lack of a strong support and agitation for CE programmes by library associations and similar organizations.

The future of CE therefore lies in the systematic, co-ordinated and concerted efforts to plan, execute and evaluate CE programmes at national, sub-regional and regional level in the following areas.

Objectives of continuing education

Firstly, it is very important to bear in mind the objectives of CE programmes which though already discussed earlier need to be recapitulated below:

1. To enable staff perform better in their present positions

2. To equip staff to move to more desirable positions

3. To satisfy staff desire to explore further aspects of the profession which interest them.

Structure and administration

Secondly, the structure and administration of CE courses must be set out clearly. Issues to clarify should include:

- each course to have a subject and objectives based on thoroughly researched needs and interests, this would avoid wastage of time and resources;

- content and level of approach should be clearly defined;

- good publicity for course needed in advance, giving adequate notice of duration, topic, target, venue and cost;

- location of venue should be central and easily accessible;

- courses should be adequately endorsed by national professional associations or international organizations so that they are not dismissed as bogus and unnecessary by the employers;

- for maximum effectiveness courses should usually be directed to specific topic and level of participants;

- courses should be evaluated.

Training of trainers

Thirdly, there is a need for training trainers. The training should ground the trainers in the philosophy, principles, methods and techniques of CE. One piece of research identified courses for trainers as outlined below (Padmore, 1991):

1. Use of computers in libraries

2. Research methods

3. Classification and cataloguing

4. Information management

5. Current awareness in library and information science

6. School librarianship

7. Utilization of resources

8. Organization of workshops and seminars

9. Leadership

10. Use of audio-visual aids.

Co-ordinating machinery

Fourthly, there is a great need for a co-ordinating machinery for CE programmes at national, sub-regional and regional level to avoid duplication and gaps or neglected areas.

Funding

Finally, very little could be achieved in CE programmes without funds. Therefore, sources of funding should be identified; one source is charging the course participants; another is a request for technical and financial aid from international organizations like: DSE, BC, NORAD, Unesco, IDRC etc. In order to minimize dependency on aid, national authorities should be approached and convinced to avail funds for CE programmes.

K. Mchombu gave the following as solutions to CE current problems:

- training institutions directly approaching employers to discuss CE;

- development programmes well in advance to enable employers to budget for the requisite training expenditure;

- designing courses to match the pocket of target groups;

- identifying training needs and proper marketing of training programmes.

 Other solutions would be: co-operation between library and information schools in offering CE programmes like that between the Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Wales and School of Library and Information Science, University of Pittsbrurgh, in running the International Graduate Library and Information Science School yearly; the production of CE teaching and learning materials and internalization of CE Programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Continuing education is not an end but a means to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and techniques by information professionals so that they are up-to-date in the administration and management of information and library systems. From these systems the users derive information which is the life-blood and pre-requisite for individual, national and international development. Change in library and information services is inevitable and will always be with us. We should therefore invest in CE to keep pace with developments so that we are able to provide information more quickly to humanity. A very difficult job but not an impossible one. July 1998.

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