Human Resource Management Practices in Academic Libraries: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Human resource is the most important asset of any organization, and the efficient management of this resource is critical to meeting the goals of the organization. Organizations have distinct human resource management policies, processes, and procedures which are used in managing these human resources. The academic library, like every other organization uses some sets of human resource management (HRM) practices to manage its human resource functions to meet the goals for which it is established. This paper discussed HRM practices in academic libraries, and outlined some of the issues and challenges the management of academic libraries face in managing its human resource practices in academic libraries in Nigeria, and finally it was concluded that the changes taking place in the academic library is rapid and unprecedented because of new knowledge creation and it is necessary for library staff to be abreast of these changes, and some recommendations were made on how to mitigate against some of the challenges outlined in the HRM practices in academic libraries in Nigeria. Such as heads of libraries liaising with HR managers of institutions to put together guidelines and procedures that will address every aspect of HRM practices.

Keywords: *Human Resource, Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Practice, Academic Library.*

Introduction

People are the main drivers of organizations. To a large extent, they are the determinants of the success or failure of the organization. To remain committed and motivated, they must be managed in a transparent, consistent, and fair manner. To achieve this, organizations develop their human resource management practices to drive the management of its human resources. These practices provide a structure and control that guide organizational decisions regarding the acquisition and management of its human resources. The academic libraries in Nigeria are no exceptions; its human resource is the core of the services it renders to the academic community. The quality of any library service rest upon two foundations, the quality and commitment of the staff and the support and resources provided by the parent body.

According to Insaidoo (2001) as cited by Adeniji, Babalola and Adeniji (2012), "human resources are the key to sustainable library services in any organization. When the services of any library are evaluated, the staff of that library is indirectly evaluated. There is therefore the need to have efficient and dynamic personnel that can translate the objectives of the library into reality." New knowledge is constantly being created within and outside the academic environment that may need to be managed by the academic library. Therefore, the library is regularly in a state of flux with new knowledge and new ways of working. The personnel in the library need to be properly managed to anticipate and cope with these changes. Hence the human resource management practices in academic libraries should be up-to-date and capable of nurturing the right personnel to meet the objectives of the library.

Like in other organizations there is a need for systematic development of human resources in libraries. However, there are issues and challenges in implementing these practices. This paper takes a look at these challenges with the aim of proffering some solutions. A library's HRM officer works with its staff, staff and understudy workers to facilitate all viewpoints of their specific work related issues. Locked in both the scholastic and authoritative sides of the institution, these individuals may moreover be included in budgeting and arranging and work on the administration group that reports to the library executive Soe (2020).This is lacking in most libraries, because HRM issues within most organizations usually sideline library and their involvement even when it comes to recruiting library staff.

Concept of Human Resource Management (HRM)

Human Resource Management is responsible for how people are treated in organizations. It is the management which deals with the human as a resource. It brings people by helping them in performing their work, compensating them for their labors, and solving problems that arise into the organization. There are seven management functions of a human resources (HR) department, staffing, performance appraisals, compensation and benefits, training and development, employee and labor relations, safety and health, and human resource research. HRM organize people toward the attainment of the organizational goal.

It is a planned process by that an organization can control their employees and use them as a proper resource. HR is the system that an organization uses to know about their employees and evaluate them. The most important point is that, under HRM, employees can develop themselves by training so that they can do the job properly. The core business of the HR manager is to develop employees, including the selection and hiring of people, the training and developing of staff, evaluating their performance, rewarding them, and creating a culture of learning and development. HRM emphasizing the acquisition, organization and motivation of human resources (Armstrong 2000), as it is the management of the organization's employees.

Understanding HRM depends highly on the various perspective taken. HRM could be conceived as a resource-based employment relationship or as a part of strategic management function (Beardwell and Holden, 2001), that reflect a shared responsibility among managers, employees, customers and suppliers for HRM (Gloet, 2006). Therefore, HRM can be defined as a specific combination of HR practices, work structures and processes that maximizes employee knowledge, skill, commitment, and flexibility. It composed of many interrelated parts that complement one another to reach the goals of an organization, large or small. According to Arvey

et al., 1991; Gelfand et al., 2008 as cited by Tanhiala, Giluk, Kepes, Simon, Oh and Kim (2014) given the knowledge gap as well as the cultural sensitivities in HR professionals' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of HR practices, two conclusions are warranted. First, we need to better communicate the existing relevant cumulative research to practitioners across countries. Second, we need more attention to gaps in research from practitioners' point of view, particularly research on the cross-cultural applicability of the mainly US-based research in different contexts.

Human Resource Management Practices

Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices are the policies and practices an organization uses to perform its human resource functions. There are six (6) major practices in HRM, they are; job analysis and job design, recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, compensation and benefits, and labour relations. The library HRM officer is responsible for developing, implementing, coordinating, and monitoring all human resources management programs and processes for the academic librarian, professional, and classified staff, and hourly assistant Soe (2020). While Dittmer (2002) viewed HRM practices as an individual's perceptions of the extent of implementation of the strategies, plans, and programs used to attract, motivate, develop, reward and retain the best people to meet organizational goals.

According to Lisbdnetwork (2018) the quality of Library and Information Centers is largely depending on the dynamic, motivated, skilled and competent staff and the infrastructure facilities provided for their service and development. The Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals are considered as one of the vital elements that can really make a library the knowledge hub. All these scholars agreed that having the right human resource is crucial to meeting an organization's goals. The study of HRM practices in relation to organizational performance has been ongoing for some time now, and Aziri, Veseli and Ibraimi (2013) argued Human resources and Human resources management are generally considered to be one of the most important issues in managing nowadays business organization.

HRM practices is usually a part of an organization's strategy used to meet its goals. Therefore, the HRM practice in one organization may be significantly different from that of another due to both internal and external factors. It is often used as a source of competitive advantage. According to Kulkarni & Dadas (2017), people have always been central to organizations, but their strategic importance is growing in today's knowledge based industries. An organization's success increasingly depends on knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) of employees, particularly as they help establish a set of core competencies that distinguish an organization from its competitors.

With appropriate HRM Practices an organization can hire, develop and utilize best brains in the marketplace, realize its professed goals and deliver results better than others. HRM practice is important because it provides a clear structure that enables employees to know their responsibilities and the organization's expectations. It promotes fairness and consistency in the human resource management process, and ensure that the organization complies with employment regulations. Hung, Ansari, and Aafaqi (2004) suggested that perceived fairness in HRM practices such as employee relations and compensation, procedures, and training are positively associated with affective and normative organizational commitment. This means that, HRM practices that are not considered fair by employees may not be able to attract and retain the best employees, and surely will not bring the bests out of employees as they will not be commitment to the goals of the organization. The assumption is that the more

committed employees are to an organization, the more motivated they are to work for the goals of that organization, and the less likely for them to leave the organization. This implies that employees in the academic libraries need to be treated well in order to avoid the challenges of leaving for another better organization.
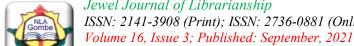
Academic Libraries

The heartbeat of any institution is the library (Misban 2016, Akpoghome 2019). The library is positioned to actualize the institutional goals. There are different types of libraries depending on the institution in which it is found. Examples are public library, special library, national library, school library and academic library among others. An academic library can be described as a library that is attached to a higher education institution, and serves two complementary purposes such as: (1) support the curriculum, and (2) to support the teaching, leaning, research of the university faculties and students. (Abubakar 2011; Adesanya and Idogwu 2015; Eze and Uzoiegwe 2013) In the past, the materials for class readings, which are intended to supplement lectures as prescribed by the instructor, has been called reserves.

It could also be seen as a designated place, physical or digital, set aside to house scholarly research materials and materials supporting the academic, university, or college community and curriculum. Before the advent of information and communication technology, the reserves were supplied as actual books or as photocopies of appropriate journal articles. Modern academic libraries generally also provide access to electronic resources. Allen and Taylor (2017) opine that Academic libraries are positioned around teaching and learning institutions. According to Tabs (2003), an academic library is defined as an entity in a postsecondary institution that provides all of the following: An organized collection of printed or other materials, or a combination thereof; A staff trained to provide and interpret such materials as required to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, or educational needs of its clientele; An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to clientele; The physical facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule.

Academic libraries must determine a focus for collection development since comprehensive collections are not feasible. Librarians do this by identifying the needs of the faculty and student body, as well as the mission and academic programs of the college or university. The contemporary academic library is seen in this deamination in services, collection of material and space

There is a great deal of variation among academic libraries based on their size, resources, collections, and services. Olajide and Adio (2017) says;

> *"...university education in Nigeria is facing a critical challenge in meeting new demand of 21st Century with its ever increasing population growth, inadequate library facilities and resources. Adequate library resources and services at the appropriate level for degrees offered should be available to support intellectual, cultural, and technical development of students enrolled in Nigerian universities. The growth of research in all fields of human endeavors is becoming increasingly detailed and sophisticated, faculty members and students have realized that the library has great role to play in the provision of information necessary for their day to day research and their academic work".*

According to Abubakar (2011), academic libraries in Nigeria are at a crossroads. This is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. He stated further that the situation in private universities also tends to portray a gloomy picture as the story seems to be the same. Oyelude (2020) opines that the situation in academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, one of the African countries hit hardest by the disease –is a mixed one. Before the pandemic, activities with different services were provided as usual. Most library now try to offer online services and suspend their shifting periods.

Academic libraries have transformed in the 21st century to focus less on physical collection development and more on information access and digital resources. Today's academic libraries typically provide access to subscription-based online resources, including research databases and e-book collections, in addition to physical books and journals. Academic libraries also offer space for students to work and study, in groups or individually on "silent floors," and reference and research help services, sometimes including virtual reference services.

The COVID-19 blindsided academic libraries and had made it to device new ways of providing services to its users in order to prevent its staff catching the disease. Cox (2020), identified the following in the era of modern libraries. The diminishing value of print collections, Mass digitization and access versus archives, E-everything, the end of big deals, Distinctive collection digitization, Copyright/fair use challenges. In the area of library services he identified the following: Self-service models and virtual alternatives, embedded librarianship, the rise of open content and open educational resources, Support for online teaching, Support for online research, the library website as a virtual front door, Personalization and the promise of artificial intelligence.

Cox (2020) listed the following under operations: Employee safety, Continuous learning and development, doing more with less, equity of access, librarian activisms. COVID 19 has given a new face for the library to operate. Therefore, for any academic library to function properly, it has to keep up with the new normal which COVID 19 has brought.

HRM Practices in Academic Libraries

In literature, there are very few studies that have shown a holistic view of HRM practices and academic libraries (Adeniji, Babalola and Adeniji 2012, Defa 2008, Ukwoma and Akanwa 2008). Some scholars have tried to concentrate on either one or more of HRM indicators. For instance, Warriach and Ameen (2015) in their study considered the status of four indicators of HRM - staffing, training and development, performance appraisal and retention strategies in university libraries of Punjab Province, noting that training and development is inevitable in libraries due to rapid change on information landscape.

Organizations in emerging countries are becoming aware of HRM practices and their importance. In Nigeria, a number of scholars have discussed the practical and theoretical issues with the implementation of HRM practices in modern Nigerian organizations, which includes higher institutions of learning (Adegboye 2013; George, Owoyemi,Onakala 2012;Oghojafor, George, Owyemi 2012). According to Mogaji (2019), there are currently over 174 approved universities in Nigeria). Each of these institutions has academic libraries that support these institutions. These libraries employ thousands of people as; professional, semi-professional, and non-professional staffs that may need to have technical, human, and conceptual skills to be able to perform their jobs. These staff needs to be well managed so

that they will continue to provide top quality services to meet the needs of these institutions. (Owolabi and Azonwu 2016) in a study elaborated the need for planning human resources in academic libraries.

The study concludes that it is essential to plan for the present and the future of human resource in academic libraries in Nigeria in order to improve on their services to users. Academic libraries in Nigeria use the following major human resource management practices to manage its human resource. According to Issa, Idowo, Amusan, Ojokutu, Adedeji and Oguntayo (2016) Human resources unarguably, constitute an integral part of organizations. Without the input of human resources, the objectives of setting up organizations will be defeated. Staff represents a way of getting the human resources required for the attainment of organizational objectives.

Job analysis and Job Design

Job analysis **is** the process of gathering and analyzing information about the content and the human requirements of jobs, as well as the context in which jobs are performed. Job design on the other hand is the specification of contents, methods, relationships of jobs in order to satisfy technological and organizational requirements as well as the social and personal requirements of the holder of the job. In Librarianship, it a process of putting individuals in the right department in which they can perform effectively such as automation section, readers services etc. For example taking an extrovert to the reader's services where he or she can have access to users and explain issues to them in a better way and taking a critical thinker to the technical section to help in cataloguing and classification of materials coming into the library.

Recruitment and Selection

The ability to attract, recruit, and hire top candidates is the hallmark of a successful academic library (Raschke, 2003). Recruitment is the preparation a pool of possible candidates for a position. In this, potential applicants are searched for, and then encouraged to apply for an actual or anticipated vacancy. Selection is the process of choosing and hiring an employee for a job among the shortlisted candidates from the recruitment process. There are certain guidelines and procedures to be followed in recruiting staff for academic libraries. Such guidelines are such that could be seen as approved by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2017) which is the higher education association for academic libraries and library workers. These guidelines have been adapted by different countries and may be affected by government policies and regulations.

Performance Management

Performance management is the process of ensuring that a set of activities and outputs meet an organization's set goals in an effective and efficient manner. The process includes clarifying expectations, setting objectives, identifying goals, providing feedback, and reviewing results. Performance management is usually an ongoing communication process between a manager and his/her subordinate. Most academic libraries in Nigeria use a set of performance index to check performances of librarians (Okoye, Mbagwu, Abanum and Nwohiri 2019; Nwokike and Unegbu 2019). This index usually constitutes input from the HR department and the head of the library so as to create a balance in the KPIs since the librarians' task are uniquely defined.

Training and Development

Training and development refers to educational activities within an organization created to enhance the knowledge and skills of employees while providing information and instruction on how to better perform specific tasks. Training aimed to improve the knowledge of an employee relating to a specific job, while development has to do with the general growth of the employee (Defa 2008, Ramadevi 2018). Workshops and seminars are usually organized for librarians in order to remain relevant in today's dynamic world. Academic librarians also benefit from trainings organized by parent institutions. Such trainings are usually geared towards achieving the overall goal of the institution it is affiliated to.

Compensation and Benefits

Compensation and benefits consist of the items below that an organization uses to compensate and reward its employees for work done for the organization.

Compensation – base pay, overtime, sales commission, bonus pay, merit pay, etc.

Benefits – health insurance, life assurance, pensions, company car, etc. According to Odunlade (2012) from library and information specialists point of view, monetary compensation is an essential component in recruitment and retention process; but benefits are equally important and can often be the deciding factor in whether an individual accepts an offer or even stays.

Academic librarians are compensated just like other faculty members of same cadre. Most of the time, compensation and benefits for academic librarians will depend on the annual appraisal or job satisfaction based on criteria spell out in their organization's handbook (Odunlade, 2012).

Labour Relations

This is the relationship between the management of an organization and its workforce. In most organizations, the workforce is organized in the form of a union that negotiates the working conditions of the employees with the management of the organization. Union membership is strongly bound to faculty status. Latham and Ditzler (2010), Garcha and Phillips (2001) cited by   Mills and McCullough (2018) academic librarians have a generally positive view of unions and collective bargaining agreements.

Issues and Challenges of HRM Practices in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

There are plethora of issues and challenges affecting the implementation of HRM practices in academic libraries in Nigeria which have impact on the service delivery of these libraries. (N*ote: for the purpose of this work, "issues" and "challenges" were taken as synonyms)*. Some of these are;

Job Analysis and Job design

With the changing roles of academic libraries especially as it broadens to include digital library services job analysis and job design has become a challenge for most academic librarians. For example, what qualifications and skills are important for Digital Librarian positions in academic libraries? This skills requirement should be specified. How can the library gather information on this job that is detailed, objective, reliable, and valid? How will

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the worth of this job in relation to other jobs be known? How will the level and amount of training required be determined? What will be the standard of evaluating this job? How will this job be designed to ensure that tasks contribute to a smooth workflow in the library? These are real challenges for academic libraries in a landscape that is still evolving. Most academic libraries do not have solution to this yet, instead they use old templates to recruit new staff

Compensation and Benefits

There is disparity in compensation and benefits between academic staff and some librarians of equivalent qualification. This leads to drop in motivation for the library employees, as they see themselves as 'second class citizens' in the institution. Because of this, the academic library is finding it difficult to attract the best. Even some who work in the library are 'bidding' their time until they find what they consider as 'better alternative'.

Training and Career Advancement

New and emerging competencies which were not required five to ten years ago, such as data visualization and communication skills, are now required for librarians to become effective at what they do. In order to satisfy the needs and requirements of the very sophisticated and knowledgeable users of the library, highly skilled personnel are required. Even though the library is the heart of the academic institution, release of funds for training is subject to management's approval. One of the reasons for this is the poor perception of library services by some stakeholders in the parent institution.

This has led to the provision of inadequate training for library staff, especially skills in the areas of information and communication technology, and digitization to enable them effectively use the rapidly growing and changing information resources. It is worthy to note that government owned universities (federal and state) have a clearly defined policy of funding, because they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institutions. However, it is regrettable that such monies are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision. For private universities, the founders/stakeholders decide arbitrarily how much to be spent on the libraries which is inadequate in most cases.

Performance Management

In academic libraries in Nigeria, especially those owned by the government, performance management is mostly done as a yearly ritual but not as a strategic tool for improving organizational performance. The culture of appraisal assessment is not ingrained in these libraries. Performance appraisal for example is not used for identifying employee training and educational needs, opportunities for promotion, as a basis for salary decisions, etc. There is also shortage of skills and lack of appropriate tools to carry out performance management exercise in the libraries. According to Waal (2007), there is a clear and strong relation between organizational performance and the attention given to performance management and employee appraisal.

Talent Management and Succession Planning

There should always be a plan in place to fill leadership positions as a result of resignation, retirement, termination, or untimely death. Replacement should ordinarily be drawn from the

library's talent pool. These talents should already be in one form of mentoring programme to upgrade their skills and capabilities. Since performance management is not properly done, this is not usually in place which sometimes lead to bringing external skills to fill positions especially that of the university librarian. It is argued though that it is necessary to bring in new "blood" to fill management positions to bring new views and perspectives to running the libraries especially in this era of globalization. However, if talents within the organization realize there is no opportunity of upward growth, it may lead to demotivation, less commitment to the library, and eventually increase in turnover.

Lack of Skilled Manpower

In this era of globalization and digitalization, in order to maximize resources such as books, journals, sound records, photographs, manuscripts etc., they must be transformed into digital forms. Established standards, tools, and skilled manpower must be required for quality reproduction. The new information era makes it necessary for library staff to have skills and expertise in ICT, online publishing, and knowledge management. Most academic libraries in Nigeria do not have the tools and skilled manpower to remain relevant in these changing era. This has led to a capability divide between these academic libraries and those of other climes, which in turn affects the quality of services being rendered in academic libraries in Nigeria, which are not digitally compliant.

Change Management

Change management is the process of getting to a desired state from an existing one. The changes taking place in the information society is very rapid and libraries need to be proactive and move with that change. Unfortunately, in most academic libraries in Nigeria, this management of change is very slow which is then often overtaken by new events. And the cycle continues. Example, it is getting too long to get the process of transition from print to digital media completed. In addition to this, the libraries are also participating in the dialogue of transforming the physical space in the libraries to foster better collaboration and accommodate other activities. These delays lead to mental fatigue, increase in cost, resistance to change, and the unwillingness to start or participate in new change management programmes.

Conclusion

The changes taking place in the academic library is rapid and unprecedented because of new knowledge creation in this knowledge age, and it is necessary for library staff to be abreast of these changes. HRM Practices in any organization directly affect the performance of its employees. So, to continue to remain relevant, the academic library must put in place the right human resource management practices, backed by its parent institution, with the intent of maximizing employees' outcome, which will enable it recruit the best, train and develop, and have the appropriate compensation and benefits scheme that will motivate the employees, to ensure their continued commitment to the goals of the organization.

The parent institutions of academic libraries should see the library as what it truly is – the heart of the academic institution, and a key to national development. Thus, the management of the parent organization should ensure that academic libraries have the necessary funds that will enable these libraries to continue to upgrade the skills of its staff, invest in tools and technology, so that they will be ready for the changes taking place in the information society in order to have the capability to continue to provide quality services. Academic libraries

should also source for other means of generating funds in the form of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) instead of relying solely on the parent organization especially in this era of dwindling finance in most academic institutions. Initiatives like consultancy services and marketing of some information services could be considered.

Job analysis and job design should be an integral part of change management in academic libraries in the changes taking place libraries. New jobs will need to be created while some will have to be retired. Academic libraries should ensure that job analysis and job design are well done especially for the new jobs coming in, because this have the power to determine employee satisfaction and therefor the level of service delivery in the future.

Recommendations

Compensation and benefits of the professional staff in the academic libraries should align with those of other academic staff. This will greatly motivate library staff, and will have the potential of attracting the best brains to the library.

It is also necessary for HRM practices as it relates to an academic library to be documented. Heads of libraries could liaise with HR managers of institutions to put together guidelines and procedures that will address every aspect of HRM practices.

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