

LIBRARIANS' REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA: AN AGENDA FOR PROFESSIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) has far reaching implications for the library profession. This paper is targeted at bringing to light these implications for the Nigerian Librarians. The paper advances the role of the LRCN as an agenda for professionalism of the librarians. Also, the position as well as status of the librarians is defined by highlighting the various roles of the librarians and the nexus between the librarian and the need for professionalism in Nigerian.

INTRODUCTION

The information professionals of which librarians belong need to redefine the profession within a broad based context of professionalism. One of the main characteristic of any profession is the existence of an active professional association to protect the interest of its members, to determine the standards of education and performance expected of them and to ensure that its members live up to pre-determined expectations. The respect and recognition accorded to a profession by society are largely determined by public understanding and acceptance of the vital role of the profession in the society. Thus, the station or librarianship in Nigeria is actually determined by the perception of the people on the duties and responsibilities of librarians.

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) was formulated by the Library (Registration etc) Council of Nigeria Act (Decree No. 12 of 1995) with the sole responsibility of registration, organization and setting standards for Nigerian Librarians. The implication of this can be appreciated by the fact that the content of the LCRN Act is one and the same with the content of the Act that established the Council that regulate and control other professional organizations such as law, medicine, engineering, pharmacy and so on. It suffices therefore, to state that Nigerian librarians will by the establishment of LCRN undergo intellectual, professional, moral, social and psychological rigors characteristic of other professions. Thus, registration with the LCRN sets professional librarians far apart from quacks and lay people.

The Nigeria Library Association (NLA) before now is the recognized body that coordinates the activities of librarians in Nigeria. In spite of this role, it has not been able to achieve much in terms of affecting national compliance with its decision or regulation (Ademiran, 2009). This situation may be as a result of its lack of legal

status, a conglomerate of professionals just interested in libraries and librarianship and, absence of restriction policy for professionally qualified members.

However, the establishment of LCRN has paved a way forward for librarianship in this age. The question therefore is: Are Nigerian Librarians adequately trained, registered and their activities regulated by the LCRN? The answer may not be affirmative as a result of inadequate information on the activities of the LCRN by librarians in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper attempted to highlight the role of LCRN as a pivot to professionalism and to set an agenda for the Nigerian Librarians in this age of globalization.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LIBRARIANS' REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA

After many years of advocacy by senior librarians for a body that would regulate the practice of librarianship, through various library associations. The Federal Government of Nigeria harkened to the need of Nigerian librarians. The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) was established on June 5, 1995 by Decree 12 of 1995 as a statutory, corporate body in perpetual succession and a common seal that may sue and be sued in its corporate name. It was inaugurated on 28th May, 2002 by the then Honourable Minister of Education, Prof. Tunde Adeniran. This milestone marked the beginning of an evolving process to regulate library practice in Nigeria.

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria began its full operation on 26th of October, 2009 with the following mandate as its responsibilities as stressed by Akpabio (2011) to include:

1. Determine who is librarian for the purposes of this Act.
2. Determine what standard of knowledge and skills are to be attained by person(s) seeking to become registered as librarians (in this decree referred to as the profession) and reviewing those standards from time to time as circumstances may require.
3. Securing in accordance with the provision of this decree, the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice the profession and the publication, from time to time, of the list of such persons.
4. Maintaining discipline within the profession in accordance with this decree.
5. Performing such other functions as may be conferred upon the council by this decree.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

a) Librarian

A librarian is an information professional trained in library and information science, which is the organization and management of information services or materials for those with information needs (Bryant, 1999).

Aguolu (2002) posited that the librarian is entrusted with the distinctive cultural and social responsibility of having to select from a universe of rapidly proliferating records, growing at an exponential rate, those that may be needed by his actual and political users, to preserve them for future use, to organize them by introducing effective access control devices, interpret their contents through personalized services, and to disseminate information stored in these records. Typically, a librarian work in a public or college library, an elementary or secondary school media center, a library within a business or company, or another information provision agency like a hospital or law firm. Essentially, librarians are veritable mediators between man and information resources that have been produced through generations.

B) Professionalism

A professional is a member of a vocation founded upon specialized educational training and having impressive competence in the particular activity of the training (Public Library Association (PLA, 2008). The essential elements of a profession include possession of a specialized body of knowledge and skills acquired during a prolonged period of education and training, existence of an effective professional association which defines admission into the profession, and training requirement, licensing and other formal requirements.

Blumer (1966) noted that "Professionalization seeks to clothe an institution with standards of excellence, rule of conduct, sense of responsibility, recruitment and training, to ensure that its individuals (members) are elevated to a position of dignity and social standing in a society". However, professionalism connotes a member of a vocation, duly registered and whose activities are regulated by a statutory body for the benefit of the individual and society. Because of the personal and confidential nature of many professional services and thus the necessity to place a great deal of trust in them, most professionals are held up to strict ethical and moral regulations.

IMPERATIVES OF A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIAN

The question that has consistently defied solution as to the status and qualification of librarians to be tagged professionals lies with the establishment of the LRCN. The professional Librarian has specific duties and roles to play.

Although specific duties of the librarian vary depending on the size and type of library, Reitz (2004) described "Librarians as information experts in the information age". Most librarians spend their time working as one of the following:

- **Public Service Librarians:** These are Librarians that work with the public, frequently at the reference desks of lending library materials. Some specialized in serving adults or children.
- **Reference or Research Librarians:** These are category of librarians who help people doing research to find information they need, though a structured conversation called a reference interview. The help may take the form of research on a specific question, providing direction on the use of databases and other electronic information resources, obtaining specialized materials from other sources.
- **Technical Service Librarians:** These Librarians work "behind the scenes" ordering library materials and database subscriptions, computers and other equipment, and supervise the cataloging and physical processing of new materials.
- **Collection Development Librarians:** They monitor the selection of books and electronic resources. Collection librarians also have a certain amount of funding to allow them to purchase books and materials that do not arrive via approval.

Archivists: These are specialized librarians who deal with archival materials, such as manuscripts, documents and records, though this varies from country to country, and there are other routes to the archival profession.

- **Systems Librarians:** These groups of librarians develop, troubleshoot and maintain library system, including the library catalogue and related systems. Although this is not very common in Nigeria.
- **School Librarians:** Work in school Libraries and performed duties as teachers, information technology specialist, and advocates for literacy.
- **Outreach Librarians:** These librarians are charged with providing library and information services for under represented groups, such as people with disabilities, incarcerated, homeless and rural communities. In an academic libraries outreach librarians might focus on transfer students and minorities.
- **Instruction librarians:** They teach library and information science skills in face-to-face classes and/or through the creation of online learning objects. They instruct library users on how to find, evaluate and use information resources effectively. They are most common in academic libraries.

The librarian, once experienced may take administrative position hence require professionalism. In reality, the technical competencies and

information seeking skills needed as a librarian are becoming increasingly important and relevant to the contemporary economy.

Sangal (1995) posited that, the society expunge has become information based, its very existence is dependent on the availability and intelligent use of information. The information needs of all need to met by the profession. Trained personnel with vision, technical expertise and managerial ability are required to guide the individual to the unit of information they require.

THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF LIBRARIANS' REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA

The goals and objectives of the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria are as follows:

- Determine who is a librarian
- Set up and maintain register of members
- Harmonize qualifications for eligibility to practice
- Install professional discipline
- Develop and maintain standards in education and practice
- To regulate and ensure order in the practice of librarianship
- Ensure compatibility of standards in library schools
- Maintaining professional discipline in the practice of librarianship
- To ensure that government agencies understand, accept and comply with the standard by the regulatory council
- Regulation of library and information science in Nigerian
- Determine the required knowledge and skill for registration as librarians
- Set-up a code of professionals ethics and conduct
- Effect a drastic improvement in the current image and perception of library service and practice
- Effect a radical improvement in the funding of LRCN

Objectives

- Develop a databank of librarian based on continuous certification of members
- Oversee compliance of set standard in library education
- Conducting investigation on alleged misconduct
- Apply appropriate sanctions as may be determined by the investigating panel
- Implement LRCN decree
- Proper accreditation of library and information science schools in Nigeria
- Integration of into the dynamic professional market in Nigeria
- Effective publicity of the relevance of library and information service practitioners in Nigeria's socio-economic environment
- Build and equip a suitable secretariat within 36 months
- Set-up code of professional ethics and conduct
- Maintaining a register of librarians.

WHY LIBRARIANS NEED TO REGISTER WITH LIBRARIANS' REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA (LRCN)

Librarians need to safeguard their professional status, because of this; the control of professional librarians should lie in the hands of a relevant body like Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). Salisu (2001) stated that with the proliferation of universities and the growing number of library schools producing librarian, the question of professional librarians arises, as there is no regulating body to evaluate their activities and approve their credibility.

The establishment of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria in 1995 and its take up operation in October 2009, had become necessary for all librarian to register because it:

1. Safeguard and protect the interest of librarians and promote the establishment and development of libraries.
2. Encourages any legislation affecting librarians to assists in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for management and development of libraries within Nigeria.
3. Work for the improvement of professional prestige and working condition of librarians.
4. Conducts studies and research for the advancement of library science, and enhances professional education by establishing proper training institutions.
5. Studies the latest ideas of library science such as library automation.
6. Bring its members into close relationship with one another, with government, eminent persons in other field, and members of other library associations at national and international levels.

The establishment of Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) is a rescue mission for Nigerian Librarians. Aguolu (2002) earlier noted that the continued non-legal recognition of the Nigerian Library profession had created many problems for the profession. The Nigeria Library Association in the past is prevented from exercising any influence on education and training of librarians, and also from regulating the professional practice of librarians. Anyone can pose as a librarian without undergoing the required professional study. In the past the word 'Librarian' has been abused and denigrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above the following recommendations are proffered:

- (i) That campaign on the need for librarians in the country to register with LCRN must be intensified.
- (ii) That universities offering training in the fields of library science/information science should ensure the registration of graduates with LCRN.
- (iii) That the government of Nigeria and private organizations should consider registration of librarian with LCRN as pre-condition for employment. This would ensure compliance in professionalization.

CONCLUSION

With the current Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), there is a clear and unequivocal definition of the boundaries of professional, para-professional and clerical duties and a determination of the levels of training appropriate to each type of library worker. The council now safeguards the librarian profession and also guides against malpractice of unqualified individuals, either posing as librarians or wrongly designed as librarians, through questionable promotion without the basic professional training. The LRCN has a recognized registration policy for its members, whereby only those who have met the educational standards and training requirements laid down will be allowed to practice librarianship at the professional level.

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