# A SURVEY OF THE PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE OF NIGERIAN PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS ABOUT LRCN

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## ABSTRACT

*The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) established by Act 12 0f 1995 is saddled with the responsibilities among others to regulate and improve the practice of librarianship in Nigeria. The study assessed the perception and knowledge of librarians in Nigeria about the LRCN. Survey research method was adopted for the study and questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was analyzed using simple frequency count. The study revealed that librarians are confident in the ability of LRCN to instill discipline; ensure human capital development; improve library standard; promote efficient and effective services delivery and professional development in librarianship in Nigeria. It also revealed that LRCN was not taught as a course or part of a course in LIS schools; many librarians are not familiar with the LRCN enabling Act; and many are aware of the requirements for registration The study recommends among others greater collaboration between LRCN and stakeholders, the production and circulation of LRCN handbook, the incorporation of LRCN into the LIS curriculum in Nigeria, and the widening of access to a copy of the LRCN Act.*

## 1. Introduction

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) is the regulatory body for the librarianship profession in Nigeria. It was established by Act 12 of 1995 to among other things determine who are librarians; determine what standards of knowledge and skills are to be attained by persons seeking to become registered as librarians and reviewing those standards from time to time; establishment and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice the profession and the publication, from time to time, of the lists of such persons; maintaining discipline within the profession; and performing such other functions as may be conferred upon the Council. The Council was not able to perform these functions until 2002 when the first governing Council was inaugurated by the then Minister of Education, Prof. Aborishade. The new board managed the Council and inducted the first set of 536 certified librarians in Nigeria in 2005 when their tenure of office ended. Nothing significant happened in the business of regulating library and information services in

Council was inaugurated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. With this development, the Council was able to employ its permanent staff to manage its operations in December, 2010 signaling the commencement of full regulation exercise. It is obvious from the period of enactment of the Act in 1995 and 2010 that, the Council had not been able to do much. Since the present management came on board, it had carried out a number of regulatory activities which include registration and certification of librarians; the induction of librarians; capacity building for librarians; sensitization of stakeholders and the general public as well as the launching of the LRCN website among others. Basically, the act of regulating a profession requires adequate knowledge and awareness by the stakeholders and the general public.

This will enable the stakeholders to be alive to their responsibilities in the profession. The public will also help in enforcing the rules and regulations of the librarianship profession. As a result, it is desirable to know the level of knowledge and perception of librarians in Nigeria about the Council. Adequate knowledge of librarians about the LRCN enabling Act and other relevant responsibilities will encourage meaningful participation in the programmes and activities of the Council.

## 1.1 Objective of the Study

This study is undertaken to ascertain the level of knowledge and confidence of librarians about the activities and programmes of the Council with a view to developing education and awareness programme that will improve access to information, programmes and activities of LRCN.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following questions:
What is the level of familiarity by librarians with the LRCN enabling Act 12 of 1995?
Was LRCN introduced to librarians during their LIS education school?
Do librarians have adequate knowledge of the registration requirements of LRCN?
Do librarians have the confidence in the capability of LRCN to regulate and promote the practice of librarianship?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Who is a Librarian?

Librarians are important people in the society; they play very crucial roles in the

development of any nation. It is important to promote the understanding of who a librarian is, to enlighten the public and avoid misrepresentation. One of the attributes of every profession is minimum entry requirement. Librarianship as practiced in many parts of the world has a level of training among others, that a person seeking to be described as a librarian must attain. Lindam (2001) described librarian as person who has studied the field of librarianship and undergone some examinations to be understood as qualified librarian. According to her, people seem to misunderstand who a librarian is, they assume that anybody working in the library is a librarian.

A librarian is a person in charge of a library or a person qualified by training for library services (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 2004). Ferguson (2009) reported that in Australia, there is a range of educational pathways to becoming a professional librarian. There are basically three: first degree in library and information science post graduate diploma in library and information science and master degree in library and information science.

**The Saskatchewan Libraries (2011) described** a librarian as a trained information specialist who holds a university undergraduate degree and a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree. Librarians are trained to find and collect all types of information - books, newspapers, magazines, databases, websites, CDs, videos, government publications and any other type of available data. They are also trained to develop systems to organize and manage this information so that it can be easily retrieved. Librarians design and deliver Information Services For Their Client Groups As Well.

## 2.2 Librarianship as a Profession

A profession according to the Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary (2008) is any type of work which needs special training or a particular skill, often one which is respected because it involves a high level of education. Sears (2006) observed that law, medicine, and theology were all considered as professions historically, the characteristics that differentiate these occupations from others were a unique body of knowledge acquired by special training, services rendered, and the ethical conduct of the service provider. Sears (2006) stated that professions were organized bodies of experts who applied esoteric knowledge to particular cases.

They had elaborate systems of instruction and training, together with entry by examination and other formal pre-reqiusites. They normally possess and enforce a code of ethics of behavior. Gonzales (2011) described profession as a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation.

Wideman (2001) identified five attributes as generally associated with all recognized professions. These are:

## a.     A Unique Body of Knowledge

This implies the existence of principles and concepts that are unique to the profession and are codified and documented so that they can be learned through formal education.

There are principles and concepts in librarianship and are taught in the various LIS schools around the world and Nigeria is not an exception. Librarianship is taught at different levels of degrees: undergraduate, postgraduate, and at professional levels. It is a fact that not all who work in the library are librarians. The librarian had a formal training and acquires necessary skills that make him or her unique in the work/profession. The activities in the library that confers expertise on librarians include collection development, cataloguing and classification, organization, storage, dissemination of information and use.

## b.     Standards of Entry

Notable professions in the world have entry standards. These standards involve formal education leading to an academic degree, years of experience, test score requirements etc. Professionalism exists when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of task, to prevent all others from performing that work and to control criteria by which to evaluate performance. Wideman (2001) affirmed that all professions must have an acceptable route to the public by which a person can become a recognized member of the profession. These standards typically involve formal education leading to an academic degree. The minimum academic requirement for a person seeking to be registered to practise as a librarian in Nigeria is first degree in librarianship.

## C.     Code of Ethics

Ethical standards or code of ethics are common to most professions. Code of ethics guides what is appropriate for every member of the profession. It guides their behavior and promotes integrity in the profession. Librarianship is a service where ethical conduct is required like every other professions in and around the world. Library Service requires honesty, integrity, efficiency, dedication and concern for the client. These attributes can be encouraged by implementation of good code of conducts and ethical values. Ethics defined what is right and wrong and provide ideals to aspire to. The presence of a code of ethics signals the competence and integrity, and provides social legitimization to members of a professional association. It serves as a means for professional socialization (Shachaf, 2005).

## d. Services Orientation to the Profession

Members of all professions and professional bodies have an important responsibility to the Community in which they live: to the public interest, not just to their current clients or employers or to themselves. This is one of the characteristics of a profession (IFAC, 2007). The service provided by a profession calls for a high degree of integrity, characterised by direct or fiduciary relations with clients (Bergh and Montangie, 1997). In his work, Wideman (2001) stated that the service orientation to a profession should reflect an attitude of the members of the profession, an attitude by which members are committed to bettering the profession itself.

## e. A Sanctioning Organization

The authentication or sanctioning organization has many purposes: sets standards and acts as a self-policing, promotes publications and the exchange of ideas, encourage research, develops and administers certification programmes, sponsors and accredits education programmes. Wideman rightly captures the major responsibilities of a professional organization; these duties are contained in the mandate of the Librarians Registrations' Council of Nigeria. Without an effective and efficient regulatory body, a profession is not likely to represent the interest of its subjects well in the society. So the existence of a regulatory body is one of the good attributes of a profession.

## 2.3 Benefits of Professional Recognition

A true professional of any trade is proud of his knowledge and skills. He works as an independent entrepreneur within or outside an organization. The possibility to be able to prove the quality of his skills will give the information professional more freedom and autonomy. Lateral-entry staff would profit even more from certification, because it makes it much easier for them to climb on the career ladder. Looking for jobs in other European countries is easier with a personal certificate, because you can prove what knowledge and capacities you have. For employers, certification makes it simpler to estimate what type of professional is needed for a certain job (Poppe, 2010)

According to Heyyaert (2007) by professional certification information professionals get a clearer and better image, the convenience of professional mobility, professional recognition and individual development tool. Osif (2006) stated that

professionalism exists when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of task, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control criteria by which to evaluate performance. Profession ensures that only qualified person is engaged in the activities that he or she is involved. This helps to address the problem of quackery in the profession and ensure standard in the system.

Regulation of a profession is a specific response to the need for certain standards to be met by the members of that profession. Regulation can address the knowledge imbalance between the provider and purchaser of professional services by providing assurance to the purchaser that the provider has the necessary qualifications and will meet the appropriate professional standards in his or her work. In this way, the purchaser is given assurance that they are receiving services of the right quality (IFAC, 2007). Regulations of professional practice help to promote the quality of services rendered by members of a profession.

Riggs (2011) stated that change is occurring faster than ever before in the history of libraries. The challenges of librarianship as a profession include among other things: media technology, computer technology, community participation, and adherence to social responsibilities. Librarianship, library systems operations, as well as library education and training must be constantly transformed to cope with the dynamics of the 21$^{st}$ century model of librarianship and professionalism (Mohammed, 2008). Professions through the regulatory agencies ensure continuous professional development of their members through constant and effective training to cope with the challenges of their callings.

Professionalism promotes acceptability by the public thereby boosting the image of the profession. One of the benefits of accreditation of academic programmes by a professional body is enhancement of acceptability and reputation of librarianship profession in the public eyes. According to Mohammed (2008) the type of accreditation a programme obtains will have direct effect on the extent to which it will be able to attract high quality candidates for admission from the pool of applicants. The greatest asset any professional association particularly service industry like librarianship can boast of is its human resources. Professionalism promotes acceptability by the public thereby, boosting the image of the profession. Theresa (2011) stated that certification and licensing by professional body adds credibility to the profession, facilitates salary increase, and advance opportunities that are available to the professional.

## 3. Research Method

The research method adopted for this study was survey research method. The research instrument used was questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed to librarians who came from different parts of the country and attended the 2$^{nd}$ induction ceremony of the LRCN in Abuja. A total of five hundred questionnaires

## 4. Data Analysis and Discussion
### Table 1: Familiarity with LRCN Act

| Familiarity with LRCN Act | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 171 | 47.1 |
| No | 192 | 52.9 |
| Total | 363 | 100.0 |

It is obvious from Table 1 that majority (52.9%) of the librarians in Nigerian are not familiar with the Act establishing the Council. The Act gives legal backing to the operations of the LRCN. It is the first document that should encourage librarians to associate with the LRCN. It gives them the opportunity to assess themselves in relation to the Act and fulfil their obligations to it and contribute meaningfully to its programmes. Efforts should be made by the LRCN to sensitise librarians about its activities and where it derived its power from. The Council should collaborate with the LIS institutions/schools to work out modalities for introducing LRCN as a course or part of a course in their curriculum. Though, a copy of this Act can be accessed from the LRCN website, much awareness needed to be created for stakeholders and the general public to use the website for necessary information about the Council.

### Table 2: LRCN Taught in LIS Schools

| LRCN Taught in LIS Schools | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 69 | 19.0 |
| No | 294 | 81.0 |
| Total | 363 | 100.0 |

From Table 2, majority (81.0%) of librarians in Nigeria reported that LRCN was not introduced to them in their library and information science (LIS) schools. LRCN is not being taught as a course or part of a course in many Nigerian schools. Stakeholders in LIS in Nigeria should work out modalities as we earlier mentioned to facilitate the introduction of LRCN to students while in school, this is to equip them with adequate knowledge of the Council and fulfill their obligation as required by the Act.

### Table 3: Knowledge of LRCN Registration Requirements

| Adequate knowledge about the LRCN registration requirements | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Adequate | 231 | 63.6 |
| Inadequate | 132 | 36.4 |
| Total | 363 | 100.0 |

Table 3 showed that so many (63.6%) librarians in Nigeria reported to have adequate knowledge of the registration requirements of LRCN. It is commendable that majority are aware of the registration requirements of LRCN but it also calls for worry that (36.4%) of librarians reported that they do not have adequate knowledge of the registration requirements. Awareness and knowledge of registration requirements is supposed to be within the range of 90% if not 100%. Efforts should be made by the Council to further educate librarians as well as the general public about its registration requirements. Again, awareness and use of LRCN website will go a long way in educating stakeholders about registration requirements as the information is accessible from it. This can help to check fake librarians and promote professionalism.

### Table 4: Librarians Confidence in Capability of LRCN

| LRCN Promotes: | Yes(N) | % | NO(N) | % | Total | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discipline in LIS in Nigeria | 330 | 90.9 | 33 | 9.1 | 363 | 100 |
| Human Capital Development | 324 | 89.3 | 39 | 10.7 | 363 | 100 |
| Standards in Library | 318 | 87.6 | 45 | 12.4 | 363 | 100 |
| Efficient and effective services delivery | 297 | 81.8 | 66 | 18.2 | 363 | 100 |
| Professional Development | 321 | 88.4 | 42 | 11.6 | 363 | 100 |

Librarians in Nigeria actually have confidence in the capability of the LRCN to promote development in many aspects of the library and information service sector of the country. Majority: 90.9%, 89.3%, 87.6%, 81.8%, and 88.4% of librarians have confidence in the ability of LRCN to instill discipline, promote human capital development, ensure standard, promote effective and efficient service delivery, and professional development in the library and information sector in Nigeria. Going by this revelation, LRCN is likely to enjoy much support from its stakeholders in Nigeria in its quest to develop the sector. Its services and activities are likely to get much patronage, provided adequate publicity is put in it.

## 5. Conclusion

As the LRCN continues to ensure standards in the practice of librarianship in Nigeria, it is important for the body to take its awareness campaigns to the nooks and crannies of the Country. Focus should not only be placed on the librarians but also, the general public, employers, educators, policy makers, etc who needed to be aware of the programmes of the Council and help in the business of facilitating development and ensuring standards in the profession.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were suggested by the researchers:
The LRCN should fashion out and increase its participation in the activities of the various local chapters of the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) as well as the National forum. The LRCN should formulate the minimum academic standards (MAs) for library schools.

It should have a working relation with the various library schools for LRCN programmes and activities to be introduced to students in their schools. The LRCN Act should be widely publicized to facilitate access to it by the stakeholders and the general public. The LRCN should encourage scientific enquiries into the challenges of the LIS sector in Nigeria, and develop, inform and organize continuous professional development programme for the librarians.

A handbook of the Council should be prepared, produced and widely distributed among the stakeholders and the public

As the Council grows and performs its functions, scientific enquiries should be made into the impact of the body to the registered librarians in Nigeria

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