

**PROFESSIONAL REGULATION OF LIBRARIANSHIP IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Professional regulation ensures restrict entry into a profession, guide against unprofessional practices, encourage good ethical conduct, advancement of knowledge, and optimum value from services provided to the public. This paper dwells on the professional regulation of librarianship in Nigeria. It highlights the various measures and means of regulating librarianship profession in Nigeria. It further stresses the process and functions as well as the challenges of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The paper also makes recommendations on how to improve the regulatory activities of LRCN.*

**Keywords:** Professional Regulation, Certification, Licensing, Registration, LRCN, Profession

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Professional regulation (PR) is a regulatory model which enables government to have some control over the practice of a profession and the services provided by its members. It is a system of agreement by an occupational group with government to formally regulate the activities of its members. This is done by government granting regulatory status to the occupational group through legislation to give legal backing to regulatory activities of the regulatory body. The essence of granting regulatory authority by the government is to ensure quality, equitable, fair, impactful service delivery by members of the profession to foster development in the nation.

Library and information managers render valuable services to their clients as well as the general public. The impact of these services can be measured, appraised, evaluated and adjudged excellent, good, fair, poor, etc. as the receiver of the services may feel it. Considering the important roles of library and information

services in the society, and the need to promote quality services delivery for national development, the Federal Government of Nigeria regulates the activities of library and information services in the country through the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). Balthazard (2010) stated that the granting of regulatory authority is done through an act of legislation (an "Act" or "Statute") which provides framework for the regulation of a specific profession. The LRCN is granted this regulatory power by the Act 12 of 1995 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Council as empowered by its Act regulates the library and information sector through programmes, projects and activities such as registration, certification, licensing, etc. One of the major functions of a professional association is the promotion of professionalism and standard through education and training. Over the years the Council has continued to formulate policies, rules and standards and implement them in line with its mandate for the growth of LIS in the country. All these are basically for the professional development of librarians in order to promote better quality service delivery to the satisfaction of the library clients and the general public.

## 2. 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 professional 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. Abbott (1998) in Sears (2006) states that initial efforts at defining professionalism: "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 prerequisites. They normally possessed and enforced 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, be it accounting, engineering, law, medicine, etc. 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 that are taught in the various LIS schools around the world and Nigeria is not an exception. Librarianship is taught at different levels of education: undergraduate, postgraduate, and at professional levels. It is a fact that not all who work in the library are librarians. The activities in the library that confers expertise on librarians include collection development, 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) 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 practice as a librarian in Nigeria is first degree in librarianship.

### **c. Code of Ethics**

Code of ethics or ethical standards is common to most professions. Code of ethics guides what is appropriate for every member of the profession. It guides the behavior and promotes integrity in the profession. Librarianship is a profession where ethical conduct is required like every other professions in and around the world. The profession requires honesty, integrity, efficiency, dedication and concern for the clients. 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. It serves as a means for professional socialization (Shachaf, 2005). The code of ethics and professional conducts for librarians was developed by LRCN and published to promote the integrity and quality service delivery.

#### **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, characterized by direct or fiduciary relations with clients (Bergh and Montangie, 1997). In his work, Wideman 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**

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. UKIPG (2000) state that a profession must have a governing body which sets standards of education and professional achievement for entry, and which set ethical standards and professional rules for members. Without an effective and efficient regulatory body, a profession is not likely to represent the interest of its subject well in the society.

### **3. Professional Regulation**

The regulation of a profession is a specific response to the need for certain standards to be met by the members of the profession. It is a means of controlling the practice of a profession. PR basically covers entry and licensing requirements, monitoring of the behavior and performance of members, disciplinary systems and procedures, and compliance with regulations (IFAC, 2007). It refers to the mechanisms by which professions are mandated to assure provision of quality services for the protection of public interest. PR by government can be achieved in two ways: self-regulation and external regulation. Self-regulation is a situation where government recognizes a professional body and delegates to it the responsibilities to regulate the profession. External regulation is a situation where the regulation of a profession is effected by government through one of its agencies or an independent agency which has been created and delegated regulatory powers. External regulation is the type that is in force in the librarianship profession in Nigeria. The LRCN is an agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria that is vested with the powers to regulate the librarianship profession in Nigeria. The Council was established by the enactment of Act 12 of 1995.

#### **4. Importance of Professional Regulation**

PR gives greater autonomy and control to a professional body which sets entry standards and practices to the advantage of the members and the general public. PR, through the regulatory body helps to set requirements for individuals to enter and practice the profession, and set up processes for disciplinary measures and evaluate the competences of members (Randall, 2000). Regulation ensures that only qualified people are able to practice the profession and better remunerations for members.

Regulation addresses the knowledge imbalance between the provider and receiver of professional services. This ensures that service provider renders competent, efficient, and effective services to the client while the client fulfills its own obligation to the provider (IFAC, 2007). PR reduces the risk that the public is exposed to from incompetent services by making them aware of competent professional.

PR provides professionals with recognition and validation of the profession.

It ensures that the right to practice in a given occupation is granted by a governing body. This is done through the process of licensing. It implies that people using the "legal title of the profession or trade" have obtained the appropriate qualifications and license to practice.

#### **5. Roles of a Regulatory Body**

There are a number of roles or functions expected to be performed by professional regulatory bodies. Balthazard (2010) identified the following as basic roles of a regulatory body:

Define criteria for registration with and certification by the body  
Prescribe codes of ethics, rules of professional conduct and standards of practice  
Investigate complaints about members and discipline members appropriately  
Issue official documentation that attests to the fact that individuals have met the requirement for registration with and certification by the body  
Manage the official register.

The enabling legislation of LRCN confers it with a number of functions in the business of regulating the librarianship profession in Nigeria. Some of these functions are as follows:

## **Determination of who are librarians in Nigeria**

Determination of the standard of knowledge and skills to be attained by person seeking to become registered librarian in Nigeria and reviewing the standard from time to time

Establishing and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practise the profession and the publication of the list from time to time

## **Maintaining discipline within the profession**

Accreditation of LIS institutions and courses of training and qualification in Nigeria

Supervision of institution and examinations leading to approved qualifications

Establishment of the librarian disciplinary committee, etc

Performing such other functions as may be conferred upon the Council by its enabling legislation

## **6. Regulating the Library Profession in Nigeria**

The only body saddled with the responsibilities to regulate the librarianship profession in Nigeria is the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). As IFAC (2007) puts it, "the regulation of profession is a specific response to the need for certain standards to be met by members of the profession". The realization of government of the value of library services and the need to promote efficient and effective service to the public for national development necessitated the enactment of Act 12 of 1995 which establishes the LRCN. Laudable as this Act might be, the political will to implement the establishment of the Council did not come until May, 2002 when the first governing Council was inaugurated. The Council was able to induct the first set of 536 certified librarians in Nigeria in 2005. The LRCN witnessed a period of inactivity from 2005 and 2009 until when an acting Registrar/CEO was appointed by the government to manage the Council by the federal government. Since this appointment, a lot has happened in the regulation of librarianship in the country.

According to Balthazard (2010), there are three levels of regulation of a profession: registration, certification, and licensing.

Registration is the least form of regulation. It requires that the name of a professional member is recorded in the official register of a professional body.

Section 7 and 8 of the Act 12 of 1995 empowered the LRCN to prepare, maintain and update the register of professional librarians in Nigeria. Between 2005 and 2013, a total of 3264 librarians have been registered to practise librarianship and the register maintained by the Council. The maiden edition of Register of Certified Librarians in Nigeria had also been published.

Certification is a stamp of approval given by a regulatory body to a member for meeting pre-determined requirements. It is generally associated with a common title that distinguishes a membership of a profession. To be registered as a librarian in Nigeria, there are requirements to be met by candidates. Section 9 of the LRCN Act itemized requirements to be met before a candidate is certified as a librarian. The candidate must possess a minimum academic qualification of first degree in librarianship, be of good character and not to have been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of offence involving fraud or dishonesty among others before being certified by LRCN to practise as a librarian in the country. The title or professional seal for a certified librarian in the country is "Certified Librarian of Nigeria (CLN)".

Licensing has been regarded as one of the most restrictive form of professional regulation. It provides a profession with monopolistic control over who can practise the profession. It is an offence for anybody to practise as a librarian in Nigeria without being licensed by the LRCN. Section 18 and 19 of the LRCN Act make it an offence for anybody to practise as a librarian without being licensed by the Council.

## **7. Other Regulatory Activities of LRCN**

In order to live up to its regulatory responsibilities, the LRCN perform other functions to ensure the development of librarianship in the country. These include:

### **a. Professional Development**

One of the responsibilities of a regulatory body is to guaranty the competency of its members and assure the quality of service delivery. It is imperative for a professional body to update the knowledge and skill of its members in the information sector. The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) made continuous professional development imperative for library and information managers. In recognition of this challenge and in line with its mandate, LRCN embarked on Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (MCPD) of librarians in Nigeria. This is aimed at equipping them with the relevant knowledge and skills to render quality services to public and improve the image of the profession. Notable among the workshops that had been successfully organized by LRCN are the e-library

management, quality assurance in library practices, school library management, free and open source software, etc.

## **b. Formulation and Implementation of Standards**

Regulatory bodies are expected to develop and enforce various standard and rules for the advancement of the profession and particularly quality services. Rules are designed to ensure that services from members of the profession to the public are of quality and effective. LRCN developed various standards and formulate rules for the regulation of librarianship in Nigeria. Among these are the minimum entry for intending candidate into the profession; school library manual aimed at improving library services at the school level; Code of ethics and professional conducts for librarians; and accreditation standard for LIS schools in collaboration with the National Universities Commission. Meanwhile, the Council is in the process of developing e-library standards in collaboration with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), an agency of government saddled with the responsibilities to promote the utilization of ICTs in the country.

## **c. Accreditation of LIS Institutions**

Accreditation of LIS institutions in Nigeria is one of the regulatory functions of LRCN. Section 10 of Act 12 of 1995, empowers the LRCN to regulate LIS institutions in the country. The enforcement of this power by the Council did not come without the realization of a number of government agencies whose functions are generally to accredit higher institutions in Nigeria. LRCN is collaborating with the National Universities Commission (NUC), a body saddled with the responsibilities to accredit courses and programmes of universities in Nigeria to accredit and review LIS courses and programmes in Nigerian universities. In a similar manner, the Council is working with other regulators of higher education such as the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) to further accredit and review library programmes in the Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country.

## **8.Challenges**

The LRCN just in three years commenced full regulatory function in the country. This leaves a number of regulatory activities to be performed. The process of regulation requires putting processes in place, developing standards and procedure for



monitoring and evaluation which evolves over a period of years before perfection. The short period of commencement of regulatory function affected adequate monitoring and evaluation of the LIS sector.

Lack of zonal as well as state offices across the country is another challenge militating against adequate regulation of the profession. This development is not good for the adequate monitoring, evaluation and promotion of awareness among stakeholders and the general public.

Part of the challenges of public institutions in Nigeria has been funding. LRCN within the period it became operational has experienced inadequate funds for the smooth operations of the Council. This is affecting the regulation of the profession across the country.

Inadequate information to update the LRCN register is another challenge of the Council. The law requires that the register of librarians be updated. But inability to access information about deceased members in particular has affected the regular update of this register.

Participation of certified librarians in the LRCN capacity building workshops is at the moment low despite the awareness campaign of the Council. The Council took it as a priority to educate the stakeholders as well as the general public about its programmes and activities. It established LRCN website, published bulletin and newsletter, participate in conferences and workshops to sensitize the stakeholders and the public.

## **9. Conclusion**

Within the last 3 years, LRCN has taken the bold step to regulate the librarianship profession in Nigeria. Basic regulatory functions and activities had been carried out, and these involved registration, certification, and licensing of librarians in the country. Standards are being developed and rules formulated to promote best practices in the business of librarianship in Nigeria. Sensitization and advocacy of stakeholders and the general public has also been a priority in the drive towards the development of the LIS sector.

## **10. Recommendations**

Intensification of public awareness campaign by LRCN Cooperation of all library and information science stakeholders with the Council to develop and transform the profession Introduction of different level of recognition for certified librarians in

Nigeria to give room for seniority within the profession Inauguration of exam  
visitation committee or panel to the LIS institutions in Nigeria as contained in its  
enabling Act Compliance of all LIS accredited institutions to the provision of the  
LRCN Act which require them to furnish LRCN with the list of graduating students  
before 31<sup>st</sup> December of every year Partnership and collaboration between LIS  
academics and LRCN to encourage scientific enquiries and solutions to librarianship  
challenges and innovations.

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