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***Library Philosophy and Practice* 2011**

ISSN 1522-0222

The Professional Visibility of the Nigerian Library Association: A Report of Survey Findings

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Introduction

A professional association may be a group of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted to organize or supervise the legitimate practice of the occupation. They may be institutions that regulate the activities of different professions in the teaching, research, and learning community. Because most of the professional institutions are born from the academic society, they act as learned societies for the academic disciplines underlying their professions. On the other hand, the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2010) says the word 'visibility' is a noun which means 'publicity'. Accordingly, the term professional visibility may mean that a profession has gained public attention and support.

However, this paper considers a professional association to be any group of learned individuals of a profession who organize and enforce a legitimate practice for professionals. While professional visibility expresses recognition and the general state at which a profession is perceived. In addition, a librarian in this work simply means anybody that has been educated and trained in library and information science and is presently practicing in the profession either in the classroom or in library of any type.

Statement of the Problem

People in Nigeria do not know about the Nigerian Library Association (NLA). One can regularly hear people in mention other professional associations, such as the Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN), Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), etc., without including NLA. Like NLA, some of these professional bodies do not conduct certificate examinations as membership criteria other than the relevant university degree, practicing experience, and registration requirement for its membership, yet they are better known than NLA. Why?

The objectives of this paper are:

- to ascertain the visibility of NLA in the Nigerian community;

- to ascertain the reasons for the lack of visibility of NLA;
- to recommend ways of enhancing the visibility of NLA.

Literature Review

According to Harvey and Mason (1995), a professional association is a body acting to safeguard the public interest of an organization, which represents the interest of the professional practitioners, acting to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body.

There are many professional associations in Nigeria that regulate different professions. Some of these associations administer certificate examinations that qualify membership to it, while others do not. Professional associations set ethical standards and standard of professional conducts for members, which include benchmarks and best practices.(Harvey, 2004).

The Black Herald magazine (2007) posted some of the names and website addresses of professional associations in Nigeria on the web. The internet list of the bodies counted only 89 professional bodies in Nigeria that cut across disciplines like accounting, engineering, agriculture, health, government, economics, business, environment, information and technology, etc. The list did not include NLA. The question to ask at this juncture is whether NLA is also a professional association.

NLA at a Glance

Recognizing that information is the wealth for every nation, UNESCO organized a seminar on the development of public libraries of Africa held at Ibadan in 1953. The seminar resulted in the establishment of the West African Library Association (WALA) in 1954, with one of its divisions sited in Lagos, Nigeria. Following the independence of Nigeria in 1960, WALA division in Nigeria was transformed to the country's national library in 1962. Oyinloye (1992) records that the national library began operation in 1964.

The establishment of a national library brought about the establishment of NLA as a professional association, a forum for library professionals in Nigeria. The objectives of NLA include the following:

- to unite persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services;
- to safeguard and promote the professional interest of librarians;
- to promote the establishment and development of libraries and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria;
- to watch legislation affecting and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment of libraries in Nigeria;
- to promote and encourage bibliographic study, research and library co-operation;
- to do all lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objectives.

The ruling body of the association is the council, made up of elected national officers, all chairmen of state chapters and the federal capital territory, eight elected councilors and all heads of the recognized eleven special interest groups of the profession. Presently, the association is headed by Professor Lenrie O. Aina, and has more than 5,000 members drawn from all types of libraries in Nigeria (Nigerian Library Association Data online).

Libraries and Librarians

Omekwu and Ugwuanyi (2009) define the library in two dimensions; arguing that the conventional definition views the library as a storehouse of knowledge, while the contemporary definition looks at the library as an "access point institution to global

information relevant for teaching, learning and development". Their work further state that there are seven types of libraries, determined by the varying services they provide. The types of libraries include national, public, special, private, children's, school, and academic libraries.

Crosby (2008) states that librarians roles and duties include:

- Outreach services, the act of providing library and information services to underrepresented groups, such as people with disabilities, low income neighborhoods, homebound adults and seniors, incarcerated and ex-offenders, and homeless and rural communities. In academic libraries, outreach librarians might focus on high school students, transfer students, first-generation college students, and minorities.
- Reference or research duties, were people on research are helped to find the information they need
- Collection development roles, where librarians monitor the selection of library materials
- Instruction, where librarians teach information literacy skills in face-to-face classes and/or through the creation of online learning objects
- Technical services, the organization and description of library materials
- Archiving services, the management of special records, manuscripts and documents
- Providing and managing access to electronic resources

Halsey, et al. (2008) write that librarians, like members of other professions, have banded together in professional associations to solve common problems and to advance the profession. These professional associations address issues such as financial support for libraries, censorship, and cooperative acquisition of library materials. They also attempt to influence legislation that affects libraries, establish policies and standards relating to libraries and librarians, and support continuing education for librarians. Almost all of these organizations publish journals or monographs relating to their particular areas of interest. Professional library associations hold conferences on a regular basis so that librarians may come together with colleagues to develop policy and share ideas.

Methdology

The paper is descriptive; therefore the exploratory and opinion poll survey methods of research were used for data collection. The study population was drawn from institutions of higher learning and research institute in Abia State non-proportionately. The institutions include: Abia State University, Uturu; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike; National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike; Abia Sate College of Education (Technical) Arochukwu; and Abia State Polytechnic, Aba.

A total of 235 respondents were purposively selected to represent the study population, 200 non-librarians 35 librarians who are NLA members in Abia State. This choice, especially for the non-librarian population, is based on Nwana's (1992) recommendation that economic implications and other control factors should be considered in sampling a very large population.

The researchers prepared two separated and structured questionnaires for data collection. The first data instrument was administered to non-librarians. The instrument focused at gathering facts to justify the first objective of this paper, which is to find out whether NLA is visible to the non-library community of Nigeria. While the second data instrument was administered to librarians, whose responses are expected to provide answers to the objectives of this paper.

Data collected was analyzed using simple percentage and frequency tables.

Table 1: The Distribution of Non-Librarian Category of Respondents

	Non-Librarian Respondents Categories	Figure Sampled

1	Teaching/research staff members	50
2	Non-teaching/non-research staff members	50
3	Undergraduate students	50
4	Post graduate students	50
	Total	200

Data Analysis

Of the 235 questionnaires distributed, 225 were completed and returned to the researchers, a 92% return rate, including 100% of the non-librarians, and 25 of 35 librarians.

Non-Librarians and the Visibility of NLA

The first objective of this paper is to find out if the non-library community in Abia State is aware of the existence of NLA. The data collected in this regards is presented below:

Table 2: The Distribution of Non-Librarians' Response, by Category, on the Visibility of NLA

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Respondents Categories				Total Response rate per questionnaire item
		Teaching/Research staff	Non-teaching/Non-Research Staff	Undergraduates Students	Postgraduate Students	
1	I have not known or heard of NLA	74% (37)	64% (32)	74% (37)	62% (31)	68.5% (137)
2	I have heard of NLA but cannot remember or write its acronym or full name correctly	8% (4)	24% (12)	24% (12)	28% (14)	21% (42)
3	I know of NLA and can write its acronym or full name correctly	18% (9)	12% (6)	2% (1)	10% (5)	10.5% (21)

	Total	100% (50)	100% (50)	100% (50)	100% (50)	100% (200)

From the table above, it can be seen that 68.5% of the study population do not know nor have heard of NLA. This response can further be seen from the perspective of the categories that comprise the non-librarian community of this paper. Thus, the teaching/research and the undergraduate groups in the study respond that they have not heard or known of NLA at the response rate of 74%, followed by the non-teaching/non-research group (64%) and finally the postgraduate group (62%). Abouty one-fifth of respondents say that even though they have heard about the association they cannot remember or write the name of the association correctly. The remaining 10.5% of the total population have not only heard of NLA but correctly wrote the association's acronym and full name.

This data is interpreted to mean that almost two-thirds of the people of Abia State are not aware of NLA, while less than one third of the people know about the profession but can say nothing concerning it.

Librarians and the Visibility of NLA

In the attempt to ascertain the visibility of NLA in the Nigerian community, consider the reasons why it is probably not visible outside the library community and recommend ways of enhancing the visibility of the association; the researchers sought the opinion of the librarians, which are presented in the tables below.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Librarians Opinion on the Visibility of NLA

	Number of Librarians that Agree that NLA do not have a visible Image in Nigeria (%)	Number of Librarians that Disagree that NLA do not have a visible Image in Nigeria (%)
	76	24

19 (76%) out of the 25 librarians declare that NLA does not have a visible image in the Nigerian community.

The Opinions of Librarians who Agree on the Non-Visibility of NLA

Tables 4 and 5 below contain the opinions of the 19 (76%) librarians who agree on the non-visibility of NLA. They gave reasons for the non-visibility of NLA and further made suggestions on how to enhance the association

Table 4: A Compilation of Librarians' Opinions on why NLA is not visible in the Nigerian Community

S/N	Reasons for Non-Visibility of NLA	Frequency
1	The services of the association and its members are for free	1
2	The association does not participate in or contribute to National issues	1
3	The association's members are not included in or nominated for positions in National bodies on education, Information, etc.	1
4	The association and her members' publications do not affect or influence the public in any way	2

5	NLA members do not comply to the association's constitution	2
6	The association's members does not respect their colleagues by sometimes allowing non-Librarians to boss Librarians in public offices	1
7	The association is very quiet in publicizing its existence and relevance	4
8	The association and its profession is not known as agent of development	1
9	The profession does not grow in its education and training	1
10	There are fewer professors and erudite scholars in the profession	1
11	The association has no professional impact on the society	2
12	Members of the association are not focused on distinguishing themselves in the society	1
13	Association members feel inferior to other professions' members	2
14	The Nigerian society does not regard Librarians at all	2
15	The association lacks a formidable legislation into professionalism	1
16	The profession of the association is not a private money making organ for members	1
17	The association is an all comers kind of profession, where anybody can come into any how	1
18	The Nigerian Government is lukewarm on the profession	2
19	Most of the profession's services is what anybody can do and go away with it	1

NB: All data above are either stated exactly as they were given or are combinations and restatement of related opinions given by respondents.

The table above contains the various opinions of Librarians on why their professional association is not visible. Among the numerous reasons listed as to why NLA is not visible in Nigeria, four Librarians insisted that the association is very quiet in publicizing its existence and relevance to the society.

Table 5: A Compilation of Librarians' Recommendations on what NLA shall do to become visible in the Nigerian Community

S/N	Recommendations for the Visibility of NLA	Frequency
1	The association should institute a professional school through legislation, and not by payment of monthly dues	1
2	The association should regularly advertise its profession in National Dailies	3

3	The association should sponsor projects for National development such as reading competitions among secondary schools in Nigeria	1
4	The association should make registration into the body compulsory for every professional member before he or she can practice	2
5	The association should work towards appointing members to political positions at the ministerial, educational agencies, information boards, Vice Chancellor and other relevant levels	3
6	The association's members should be very proud of their profession in the public	4
7	The association should engage in constant Radio and Television programmes aimed at projecting her image	2
8	The association and its members can sell their image to the Nigerian public by understudying and publishing issues/matters that the reading population of the Nation can find interesting to seek for, pay for and read regularly like they read newspapers	2
9	The association can sell her image to the Nigerian community by organizing seminars and symposia that will affect the public regularly and sensitize them of the importance of the profession to all sectors of life	3
10	The association should formulate and observe principles, ethics and code of conducts to guide the services of its members wherever they are	3
11	The association should lobby the National Assembly to ensure that every elementary and secondary school library in Nigeria is equipped and mandatorily manned by a Librarian	1
12	The association should enhance and also harmonize the curriculum for education of her members so that there will be uniformity in the curriculum which should be adopted in all library education institutions	1
13	Librarians, who are the associations' members, should strengthen their research wings and strive to attain the professorial cadre like their fellow academics in other professions.	2
14	The association should mandatorily observe their weekly events publicly in all the cities of the Nation	3
15	The members of the NLA should not see themselves as inferior to other professional association members, but rather compete favorably with them.	4
16	The association should encourage one spirit and team work	1
17	The association should drive for members to increase her population	1
18	The association should adopt contemporary ways of discharging their professional duties so as to remain unique	1

19	The association should make the Library profession attractive to non-Librarians to seek membership as people seek membership of bodies like NIM	1
20	The Librarians Registration Council Nigeria (LRCN) should be more vocal in things concerning the Librarians	1
21	The association should be media friendly	1
22	The association can be known if they monopolizing some practices related to her profession. For instance, the profession can make it compulsory that ISBN and ISSN numbers can only be given to publishers and authors through a librarian as the agent.	2

NB: All data above are either stated exactly as they were given or are combinations and restatement of related opinions given by respondents

The table above contains the various suggestions of librarians on how NLA can become visible enough in the Nigerian community. While librarians maintain that the association's members should be very proud of the profession in the public, another four librarians suggested that the members of the association should not see themselves as inferior to other professions' members, but rather compete favorably with them.

The Opinions of Librarians Who Do Not Agree on the Non-Visibility of NLA

Out of the 6 (24%) librarians that disagree on the non-visibility of NLA, only two among them supported their position with reasons as presented in table 6 below.

Table 6: A List of Reasons Submitted by Librarians Who Disagree With the Non-Visibility Of NLA

S/N	Reasons for why NLA is Visible	Frequency
1	NLA is an academic based association	1
2	NLA should only be recognized in the academic environment	1
3	NLA is not like the Nigerian Medical Association or Nigerian Bar Association who make direct contact with the public	1
4	NLA can only owe visibility to her members and not to the public, and good a thing, librarians everywhere recognize NLA.	1

Conclusion

NLA is one of the professional associations of Nigeria. The visibility of the association in Abia State and Nigeria is poor. A good number of librarians in Abia State agree that the association is not visible. This may be the reason that the *Black Herald* magazine did not include the association in its list of professional associations in Nigeria.

However, among the few librarians who did not agree that the association is not visible maintain that the association is an academic body whose popularity cannot go beyond the academic community, arguing that while professional bodies like Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) and Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) may be popular because of their

direct contact with the public, NLA may not because her focus is on teaching and learning. Yet, the paper observes that librarians, found in various types of Libraries, offer services to the public. For instance, apart from the direct contact of the public Libraries with the public, academic Libraries are like the bedrock for the making of members of other professional associations in Nigeria.

Thus, from all percentage distributions of both librarian and non-librarians responses on the non-visible of NLA in this paper, it is deduced that NLA is not visible. Moreover, taking cognizance of the varying involvement and impact of the other numerous professional Associations in Nigeria that cut across disciplines, and how noticeable they are to the Nigerian public, this paper concludes that NLA should not be an exception.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that NLA should find her perceptible niche in the Nigerian community. The present leadership of the association should critically consider the suggestions of librarians in this paper towards attaining a visible and vibrant association for library and Information professionals in Nigeria. For doubt of the findings in this paper, the researchers further recommend investigations on this subject matter in other states in Nigeria and the collection of suggestions and opinions of librarians in other to help build and strengthen the image of NLA.

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