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Librarians as Academics in Nigerian Universities: Revisiting the Quest for Justification and Matters Arising

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Abstract

The quest for librarians to be given their rightful place as academics in Nigerian Universities prompted this paper. From a comparative viewpoint, the need for librarians to enjoy the same rights and privileges as lecturers was highlighted. The paper provided ample justifications for granting librarians academic status in Nigerian Universities. It also discussed matters arising from the implementation of the National Universities Commission's directive on the academic status of librarians. The paper proposed the systematic implementation of PhD Qualification for librarians, review of librarians' cadres vis-à-vis those of lecturers and the need for the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and Nigeria Library Association (NLA) to play more influential roles, as key strategies for addressing the issues of inequality between librarians and lecturers. The paper concluded that as academics, librarians should be ready to take responsibility to acquire necessary qualifications and play leading roles in research, scholarly publications and other academic endeavours.

Keywords: Academic librarianship, librarians, Nigeria, Nigerian Universities,

Academic libraries, National Universities Commission

Introduction

The concept of librarianship comprises the processes and procedures involved in the acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination of information resources. The practice of librarianship in higher institutions of learning like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, among others is what is referred to as academic librarianship. Consequently, professionals (librarians) who work in the libraries of these institutions are called academic librarians. However, the tasks of the academic librarian goes beyond the traditional job description of acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination of information resources. It includes core academic activities like research, scholarly publishing and participation in academic discourses and presentations in conferences, seminars and workshops (Mbolin, 2014). The concept as used in this paper excludes faculty who teach in library and information science (LIS) departments.

Academic librarianship has come a long way in Nigeria. Its origin can be traced back to 1948 when the first university – the University of Ibadan (then University College, Ibadan) with its library was established. Since then, there has been proliferation of universities in Nigeria. Currently, the country has 192 universities (National Universities Commission, 2021) and 61 polytechnics (MySchoolGist, 2021); these are apart from colleges of education and others. These institutions were established alongside with libraries; hence there are as many academic libraries as there are higher institutions of learning. Each of the libraries are run by professional librarians; thus academic librarians constitute a larger percentage of the total number of librarians in Nigeria. Salaam and Onifade (2009) observed that academic librarianship started in Nigeria with a big advantage, as the first tertiary institution in the country, the University of Ibadan accorded librarians academic status right at inception. However, this was changed by the Udoji Report of 1975 which categorized librarians as non-academic staff. This generated a lot of arguments and debates until 1993 when the National Universities Commission (NUC) reversed the trend and directed all Federal Universities to accord academic status to librarians. While all public universities (Federal and State) have implemented the NUC directive, the implementation of the directive has been discretionary among privately owned universities. De Pew (1983) cited by Akanbi, Basri and Bola (2015) made clarifications on the differences between faculty status and academic status. According to the later, ‘faculty status for librarians is the possession of all or most of the privileges of the faculty lecturers, including faculty rank while academic status is the possession of some but not all-usual faculty privileges, as academics but always without faculty

rank'. However, in the Nigerian academic landscape, both are used interchangeably. Currently, there is less focus on the academic status of librarians, as most universities appear to have implemented the policy; however, the attention is now on the need for valid justification, as the status is constantly under threat from teaching staff, university management and governing councils especially in privately owned institutions. Aside this, academic status for librarians has various implications. This paper provides justification for the academic status of librarians as well as examines other germane issues arising from the implementation of the NUC directive in universities over the years.

Justification and Criticisms on Academic Status of Librarians

It has been touted for long that librarians in academic libraries enjoy academic status like their counterparts in the classroom. cursory observation however shows that librarians working in academic libraries have partial academic status as certain benefits attributed to being members of faculty do not apply to them. While it is an established fact that librarians can go for sabbatical, get promoted using criteria for academic staff, and are recognized as members of Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria, the subsisting argument is focused on disparities in nomenclatures, positions and recognition.

From historical perspective, academic librarians in Nigeria were stripped of academic status through the Udoji report of 1975 that reclassified academic librarians as non-academic. As earlier mentioned, librarians at the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) were accorded full academic status from onset, having full recognition (Salaam and Onifade, 2008). There should not have been any debate about the academic status of librarians in Nigeria but for the Udoji report, however librarians in Nigeria debated it and the activities of various labour pressure groups in the education sector ensured that by 1993, the NUC directed that librarians in all federal universities should be accorded the academic status which should reflect in appointment and promotion (Salaam and Onifade, 2008).

The interpretation of NUC directives since 1993 appears to be the challenge confronting members of management in Nigerian universities and other academic institutions. There have been disparities in implementation of the directives. In some Nigerian universities, a few number of academic librarians who are in practice have been able to attain professorial cadre like their counterparts in the classroom, while many others may never be able to do so till they end their

careers. This challenge is not limited to Nigerian librarians, academic librarians in the United States also experience same as noted by Drobnicki (2014) who stated that despite the fact that librarians in universities have been accorded academic status on paper, the disparities in working condition, responsibilities and benefits is so vivid.

Several debates have ensued from the issues surrounding academic status of librarians leading to divergent opinions from librarians and other faculty members. While some argued in favor of the academic status of librarians, there are those that contradict the idea and others that are indifferent. Coker, CanDuinkerken & Bales (2010) reprimanded faculty that oppose the full academic status of librarians as being ignorant of the responsibilities of librarians. From the perspective of Walters (2015), academic librarians should not be discriminated against as they are no less in academic engagements as other faculty members. Librarians publish in peer reviewed journals, teach in classes and give formal and informal instructions to library users that include faculty, staff and students; they engage with researchers in research work providing embedded reference services, promote reading culture and engage in community development activities. Dunn (2013) however argued that the faculty status of librarians could add to existing financial responsibility that has forced many institutions to resolve to the use of adjunct lecturers. Pinto and Sales (2015) however argued that information literacy initiatives of recent, have brought further awareness to the fact that librarians are needed for teaching engagements and should be given full academic status in practice.

There should not be any need for arguments with regards to the academic status of librarians if the cliché that *the library is the heart of the academic community* is anything to go by. Removing the heart automatically renders an individual dead. If librarians that administer the library are therefore not reckoned with, it does not make any scientific sense to conclude that the library should function well on its own. Murray & Ireland (2018) did a nationwide investigation on the opinions of provosts and found that majority of provosts perceived the library as a very active part of the educational development of students. This implies that students and teachers rely on the libraries for research, teaching and learning. Librarians are also involved in educating staff and students on how to effectively and efficiently use library resources. Uzoagba, & Okiche (2018) explained that librarians are core and active participants in the accreditation of courses in the universities in Nigeria. This academic roles of librarians which is beyond the surface should be considered in the

treatment of librarians in academic institutions. Though the issue appeared resolved by the NUC, there are discrepancies especially in emoluments, designations and appointments between lecturers and librarians. Most of the arguments are centered on insinuations that since librarians do not teach or supervise students' projects, they cannot be part of the faculty of a university. In responding to these arguments, there are pertinent questions to be asked and answered; these include – what qualifies an individual to be called an academic staff? Must one be a teacher, to be called an academic?

The term academic staff is used in various forms and have been defined in various ways in literature. A summary of the various definitions within our context would imply that the term 'academic staff' could refer to qualified professionals who are responsible for planning, directing and undertaking academic instruction, research and service in higher institution of learning (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002, and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2009). The term is used interchangeably with teaching staff and faculty in some countries, while these could mean different things in some other countries. From the definition provided above, it is clear that the teaching function is not the only component of the term 'academic staff'. Research and service are important components of the concept. Academic Librarians have always argued that their role of providing academic resources and services to facilitate teaching, learning and research is a core academic activity. Salaam and Onifade (2009) opined that librarianship as an academic profession is involved with the selection, acquisition, organization and dissemination of knowledge; and these functions are closely related with the teaching profession. The latter further observed that consequent to the accordance of academic status to librarians, academic librarians are now required to publish academic papers as part of the requirements for promotion. More so, the professional duties of the librarian like collection development, classification, cataloguing, information literacy and reference services among others involve rigorous academic analyses, and strategic implementation.

A major argument against the academic status of librarians is their non-involvement in the supervision of students' projects, dissertations and thesis. However, librarians' complimentary role of providing information resources to help students in writing their projects is considered a core academic activity that stands side by side the supervisory role.

Matters Arising

Accordance of academic status to librarians has not been without challenges. Some of the challenges are discussed below.

Requirement of Doctoral Degree for Academic Librarians

It appears that Management of higher institutions in Nigeria have come to a conclusion that librarians cannot attain specific academic positions such as Senior Lecturer, which is equivalent of Principal Librarian without a doctoral degree. Although there is no known document stipulating this, it is however becoming increasingly clear that doctoral degree is needed because most advertisements to fill vacancies for higher library positions require the possession of doctoral degree. It also appears that other institutions such as colleges and research institutes are also going in the same direction, noting that doctoral degree would be an added advantage to individuals applying as heads of libraries. There is however no clear directive in this regard from the NUC, Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Nigeria Library Association, Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) and other relevant bodies.

Several opinions have been aired on the need for academic librarians to have doctoral degrees to attain certain positions. This argument is not limited to Nigeria. In developed countries, the need for academic librarians to have doctoral degree has also generated some levels of argument (Marcum, 2012). The argument that seems to be prevailing is that if academic librarians take academic responsibilities and enjoy benefits accrued to their counterparts in classrooms, it is also reasonable that they should have doctoral certification. It is argued that doctoral degree prepares one for academic leadership in research and critical thinking for proffering solutions to identified problems (Galbraith, Garrison, & Hales, 2016).

A focus group discussion was carried out among librarians and the theme of the discussion focused on skill, personal attributes, motivation and beneficiaries. From the themes, responses of librarians indicated that they were positively disposed to acquiring doctoral degree. On the theme that focused on skills, it was observed that majority noted that the skills acquired in the process of doctoral studies could be engaged to deliver new services and help patrons. The theme on personal attributes showed that pride of achievements was also prominent as part of the supports for doctoral degree. Motivation theme showed that career opportunities, jobs within the library, equal status with other academics who are also patrons could motivate librarians, love of learning and 'do it

yourself' perception were responsible for librarians' preference for doctoral degree (Hornung, 2019).

Designation of Librarians and Lecturers' Equivalent

Librarians have been clamoring for designation as equivalent of lecturers in the promotion criteria since the same requirements are used for promotion. A few Universities have implemented this, while majority have not. On assumption of duties with Master's degree, academic librarians are employed as Librarian II which is equivalent to Assistant Lecturer. After fulfilling tenancy period and meeting required publications, they are qualified to move to Librarian I which is equivalent to Lecturer II. This continues till they get to the position of Principal Librarian which is equivalent of Senior Lecturer, Deputy University Librarian which is equal to Associate Professor and the final stage which is the University Librarian, an equivalent of a Professor (Harrington & Gerolami, 2014)

The main argument of librarians is that the nomenclature of Librarian II, Librarian I and other cadres should be at par with their counterparts in the classroom. Jacobs (2014) asserted that the attainment of academic status by librarians is usually through diligence and persistence. Demonstrating scholarly aptitude is therefore inevitable for librarians. If librarians have several professionals attaining doctoral degrees and are able to deliver academically and professionally, it may not be hard to erase the already narrowed gap between academic librarians and their counterparts in the classroom. Arguments still subsist that lecturing has not been exclusive to lecturers as librarians also take courses on use of library, information literacy, user education and several other training programmes organized for faculty, staff and students.

Post Tenure Status of Heads of Libraries

The need for policy review by stakeholders in library profession in Nigeria is paramount. There are professional issues that members should not be bothered to take responsibility for. One of such issues is the placement of heads of libraries after the end of their tenure. Unlike other principal officers such as the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellors who remain professors and return to classroom after their tenures, the University Librarian is left in a limbo at the end of his or her tenure. There are librarians whose career journey appears smooth and they attained the peak as heads of academic libraries on time. At the expiration of their tenure, what becomes of their

career path would be a major issue that could be bothering such individuals. There will be an enormous cut in wages if such individuals choose to remain in the library, as they cannot remain on the professorial cadre. The Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) would need to engage the National Universities Commission in resolving this crisis.

Non Inclusion of Librarians on NUC Accreditation Team

Accreditation of higher institutions is premised on the need to ensure high standards through adherence to ideal practice in admission of students, employment of faculty, acquisition and maintenance of facilities and control of procedures to promote standardization. One of such requirements for quality education is the library which is primary to faculty, staff and students. The library is referred to as the heart of the institution because institutional repository for knowledge in electronic and physical formats are selected, acquired, processed, organized, preserved and made accessible through qualified personnel. It could therefore be argued that such a very strong arm of the institution should be separately accredited to ensure compliance to right standards and best practices which would reflect on teaching, learning and research that will lead to development.

In Nigeria, the NUC is saddled with the responsibility of accrediting university programmes. It carries out this responsibilities periodically. Usually, the NUC would send a team of professors, who are experts in the particular field of study (programme) to be accredited in any given university. The library is a key resource that must be evaluated by the NUC team. Unfortunately, there are usually no librarians in the NUC team. Consequently, professors who are non-librarians are made to evaluate the library. The point is that librarians who are academics are in a better position to evaluate libraries. According to Bello (2014), the standard of the library has relationship with the quality of teaching, learning and research.

Therefore, ensuring that at least a librarian is a member of NUC accreditation teams to universities will be a positive addition in evaluation of library services, staff qualification, suitability of resources and adherence to standard practice.

Suggestions on the Way Forward

In a bid to address the challenges that have been identified, this paper makes the following suggestions:

1. Systematic implementation of PhD qualification for Librarians

The possession of a PhD is a major requirement for academics in Nigeria. It is considered a *sine qua non* for developing research capabilities and for reasons of promotion. Librarians as academics are required to do researches and publish the findings. Therefore, the possession of PhD for librarians should be a welcome development. Most librarians are willing to undertake PhD programmes to enhance their research capabilities. However, as earlier observed, there are very few universities in Nigeria who offer PhD in Library and Information Science; these universities are only able to admit a very limited number of candidates (compared to the number of applicants) per session (Salaam and Onifade, 2009). Most academic staff in other fields of study do not have this peculiar challenge, as many universities in the country run their programmes. More so, University Managements are compelled by the National Universities Commission to provide study leave to academic staff to undertake higher degree programmes; however, in granting such privileges, most universities give priority to teaching staff, other than librarians. This may be because of the emphasis placed on the qualifications and cadres of teaching staff by accrediting bodies, including the National Universities Commission. Thus, with regard to PhD studies, librarians do not have the same opportunities and privileges as their counterparts in other disciplines. Therefore, it may be necessary for University Managements to critically consider peculiar challenges of librarians, pertaining to the possession of a PhD in the implementation of promotion criteria.

It is hereby suggested that the requirement of PhD for librarians, should be applicable only for promotion to higher cadres like Deputy University Librarian and University Librarian positions for now. This will provide librarians in lower cadres ample time and opportunity to acquire their PhDs before they get to the positions to apply for such higher cadres.

2. Review of Librarians' Cadres vis-à-vis those of lecturers

There is need to review and re-designate the cadres of librarians to be at par with those of other academic staff in universities. This will help to correct the anomaly that occurs when a University Librarian as principal officer finishes his or her tenure. There are currently two models of cadre designations for librarians in Nigerian Universities. Tables A and B below show the two models:

Table A

S/N	Cadre	Lecturer Equivalent	Conditions
1	Assistant Librarian	Graduate Assistant	Possession of a good first degree (First Class or Second Class, Upper Division)
2	Librarian II	Assistant Lecturer	Possession of a Master's degree
3	Librarian I	Lecturer II	Master's degree with requisite publications or possession of a PhD
4	Senior Librarian	Lecturer I	Master's degree with requisite publications+ PhD (or the candidate must have submitted his thesis for external assessment prior to the application)
5	Principal Librarian	Senior Lecturer	Possession of PhD, requisite publications and had served as a Senior Librarian for at least two years.
6	Deputy University Librarian	Associate Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had served as Principal Librarian for at least three years
7	University Librarian	Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had served as Deputy University Librarian for at least three years.

Table B

S/N	Cadre	Lecturer Equivalent	Conditions
1	Assistant Librarian	Assistant Lecturer	Possession of a Master's degree

3	Librarian II	Lecturer II	Master's degree with requisite publications or possession of a PhD
4	Librarian I	Lecturer I	Master's degree with requisite publications+ PhD (or the candidates must have submitted their theses for external assessment prior to their application)
5	Senior Librarian	Senior Lecturer	Possession of PhD, requisite publications and had served as a Librarian I for at least two years.
6	Deputy University Librarian	Associate Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had served as Principal Librarian for at least three years
7	University Librarian	Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had served as Deputy University Librarian for at least three years.

The two models placed the University Librarian on the same cadre as a Professor. The problem with this arrangement is that while the Professorial rank is a cadre, that of the University Librarian is not just a cadre, it is a principal officer appointment. Ideally, the position of a University Librarian is more of an office (like the Vice Chancellor and other principal Officers), rather than a cadre. The implication is that while the Vice Chancellor remains a Professor, at the completion of his/her tenure, the University Librarian finds himself/herself in a dilemma, at the expiration of his/her tenure; while other academic principal officers return to their various departments as Professors, the University Librarian cannot remain on the same Professorial cadre (after his/her tenure), even if he/she remains in the library.

This paper suggests that the position of the University Librarian should not be a cadre; instead, it should be an appointment, like those of other principal officers. It should be such that a University Librarian can remain on the professorial cadre and serve in the library, at the completion of his/her tenure. Consequently, the following model (Table C) is proposed:

Table C: Proposed Model

S/N	Cadre	Lecturer Equivalent	Conditions
1	Assistant Librarian	Assistant Lecturer	Possession of a Master's degree
3	Librarian II	Lecturer II	Master's degree with requisite publications or Possession of PhD
4	Librarian I	Lecturer I	Master's degree with requisite publications, evidence of commencement of PhD programme and must have served as librarian II for at least three years. OR Possession of PhD with requisite publications and had served as librarian II for at least two years
5	Senior Librarian	Senior Lecturer	Possession of PhD and requisite publications and had served as a Librarian I for at least two years. OR Possession of Master's degree, double requisite publications and must have served as Librarian 1 for at least 4 years (in lieu of PhD) and evidence of commencement of PhD programme.
6	Principal Librarian	Associate Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had served as Senior Librarian for at least three years
6	Deputy University Librarian	Professor	Possession of PhD, requisite publications, assessment by external assessors and had

			served as Principal Librarian for at least three years
7	University Librarian	Principal Officer (By Appointment)	By Governing Council's Appointment, in addition to all the requirements in (6) above.

*All the positions require certification by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN)

This model proposes that the Deputy University Librarian position should be the same as the professorial cadre. The University Librarian is also a professor, but occupies the office on appointment by the university's governing council. This implies that the University Librarian can remain on the professorial cadre in the library, at the expiration of his/her tenure.

3. Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria and Nigeria Library Association should play more prominent roles

Apart from providing opportunities and platforms for members to interact, professional bodies and associations help to influence the policies of government and their agencies to protect and promote the interest of their members. Librarians do not expect less from the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria and the Nigeria Library Association, which are the umbrella bodies of all librarians in Nigeria. It is however surprising that both the LRCN and NLA have not taken formal steps to lobby the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission to address the challenges confronting academic librarians in Nigeria. This trend needs to be reversed.

Other professional bodies in Nigeria like the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) have played very prominent roles in protecting the interests and rights of members of their respective professions in academic institutions in Nigeria. LRCN and NLA should take a cue from these bodies and take up the responsibility of protecting and promoting the interests of librarians in universities and other institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that the academic status of librarians is not questionable. Like every other academic staff of universities, librarians should enjoy the rights and privileges of being academics. However, they should be ready to take responsibility to acquire necessary qualifications and play leading roles in research, scholarly publications and other academic

endeavours. Librarians are willing to pursue and acquire PhD degrees, if they are given the opportunity to do so.

The NUC and University Authorities should address issues around inequalities between librarians and lecturers. Similarly, the NUC should monitor the implementation of academic status for librarians in universities and sanction defaulting institutions accordingly. It is hoped that the recommendations made in this paper will be implemented by the various agencies of government, university authorities and professional bodies and associations.

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