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Women Librarians in Nigerian Universities: Their Status, Occupational Characteristics, and Development

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Abstract

This paper investigates the current status and occupational characteristics of professional academic women librarians in Nigeria. This paper also discusses the concept of gender participation in librarianship and the effects on the profession with respect to females. General obstacles faced by females in librarianship are examined. The findings reveal that despite some cultural traits that still affect the woman's position, women academic librarians in Nigeria can still advance to any height in the profession. This study shows that they do not experience any form of discrimination from their male counterparts in terms of remuneration or career development.

Introduction

Discrimination against women has been a long-standing issue with which society continues to grapple. As soon as you are born a woman, people start limiting your possibilities, regardless of what qualities you display (Abiola, 2004). It is therefore not in dispute that from the beginning of civilization, women have suffered subjugation, degradation, oppression and all forms of inhuman treatment on account of their gender. This is especially so in Africa where gender roles are distinct. The women are occupied with domestic responsibilities, which typically involve household chores and caring for the home (Majanja and Kiplang'at, 2003). The status of women, including the different professions, has been a cause of serious concern in every culture and every climate through the years (Falaiye, 2004). In the past, particularly in Africa, more emphasis was placed on educating the male child than the female child. Even when a female child grew up and wanted to take on a job, she was left with limited choices. Typical female jobs included petty trading, subsistence farming and casual labor. These were low paying and low status jobs.

The situation is a lot different now because of improved access to education by women which has broadened their horizons and given them many job options. In the past 20 years, in particular, there has been a shift away from looking at gender inequality as an issue that affects women only, occasioned by an understanding of the nature of power as gender and its implications for society as a whole (International Idea, 2000). It is common therefore to find women all over the world in different professions and at different levels competing with their male counterparts. The Nigerian constitution, (1963) reviewed, (1999) upholds equal position and opportunities for men and women. By this, women acquire the same training alongside the opposite sex (male) thus acquiring the same experience which is the bed-rock of leadership qualities. Women form the backbone of library and information services (Barrington, 1993). In some cases in Nigeria, a few women librarians have achieved the rewards associated with high status careers.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the current status, occupational characteristics and career advancement opportunities of professional women librarians in Nigerian universities. This study was motivated by a similar study of Kenyan women librarians by Majanja and Kiplang' (2003). In that study, they found that the status of women librarians in Kenya has consistently been lower than that of men in terms of position and remuneration. It is hoped that this study would throw more light on the status of women librarians in Nigeria and add to the body of knowledge on women librarians in general.

Literature Review

Gregory and Ramirez (2000) discuss the steady rise of salaries for librarians in the United States of America and observed that average beginning salaries for 1999 library and information graduates was a 6.5% increase over the 1998 average. They however expressed surprise that the average salaries increased only 5.2% for women in 1999 while salaries of men leaped 12%. Jones and Goulding (1999) stated that the status and role of women had been an issue of controversy and interest in all occupations since the 1960s and the library profession was no exception. According to them, equality of opportunity involves ensuring that women have no doors closed to them that are open to men, but that despite over a quarter of a century of sex discrimination legislation in U.K. and actions by organizations to improve equal opportunities for women, women are still under represented at senior management level. McRae (1996) stated that the presence of women in senior management positions had increased, but women were still a small minority in the boardroom. Ogunrombi, Pisagih, and Udoh (2002) examined the contribution of female librarians to library development in Nigeria from 1960 to 2000. Their study revealed that only

few female librarians were included and cited in Nigerian biographical works. Their study also showed that the status and role of women librarians in Nigeria was marked by an “explicit pattern of discrimination.”

Jones and Oppenheim (2002) carried out a study to determine if the UK library profession suffered from so called intra-occupational segregation, whereby men dominate the senior positions within the profession’s institutions. Particular attention was paid to the so called “glass ceiling” whereby women find a barrier to promotion when they reach their forties, even though up till then, they enjoyed a reasonably successful career. A “glass ceiling” is an unofficial barrier to an upper management or other prominent positions within a company or other organization which certain groups, particularly women, are perceived to be unable to cross due to discrimination (Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia, 2005). It further states that the main barrier appeared to be due to domestic responsibilities. Jones and Goulding (1999) write that women form the backbone of library and information services. They numerically dominate the profession to the extent that 75% of librarians are women. However, only 9% of women, compared with 20% of men, earn over £27,000 (Poland, 1996). Despite the image of librarianship as a female profession, women are not prominently represented at the higher levels of management. Explanations offered for this state of affairs are numerous and varied, such as inadequate child-care facilities, career interruptions, male work cultures and discriminatory attitudes in the workplace.

Librarianship as a Profession

Aguolu (1986) observed that the essential elements of a profession include the possession of a specialized body of knowledge and skills acquired during a prolonged period of education and training; existence of an effective professional association which defines admission into the profession and training requirements, licensing and other formal requirements and career lines within the profession with autonomy or discretion of numbers to take final decisions in their areas of competence; a code of ethics, regulation of relations of professionals with their clients and colleagues, service orientation and assurance of public or societal recognition. It was in the 19th century that librarians emerged as a professional group in USA. In 1876, the American Library Association (ALA) was formed followed by the formation of the Library Association of England in 1878 which was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1898.

The library profession in Nigeria can be traced back to the Nigerian pre-colonial era. In 1900, the Justice Ministry Library was established in Lagos out of the need for bibliographical control of growing colonial legal documents. The only library then was the European Community or Club Library whose membership was restricted to the Europeans except for non-Europeans who could afford a registration fee of one

guinea per adult. This prohibitive cost led to consultations with the colonial government and Lagos Town Council about the possibility of setting up a new library for Lagos. In 1948, the British Council opened the Lagos Municipal Library (L.M.C.). After three years of joint management, the British Council handed over the library to the Lagos Municipal Council in 1952.

John Harris (1970) states that between 1949 and 1950, the new profession of librarianship was born in Nigeria and its christening was in 1953. The UNESCO Seminar on Public Library Development in Africa was held at Ibadan, Nigeria in 1953. This seminar gave birth to the formation of the West African Library Association, comprising Anglophone countries of West Africa. With the attainment of independence by Ghana and Nigeria from Britain in 1957 and 1960 respectively, the Ghana Library Association and the Nigerian Library Association were formed respectively. The birth of these two National Associations led to the dissolution of the West African Library Association in 1961.

Gender Issue and Roles

The library profession in the United Kingdom and United States of America is regarded first and foremost, as a “lady” profession while in Nigeria the Librarian is mainly a “he” (Falaye, 2004). In the United States of America, the ratio of men to women in the field of librarianship is about 4 to 1 (80% plus) (Idowu, 1998). The profession of librarianship the world over is open to men and women irrespective of their gender. Women’s right to self-determination is rapidly becoming recognized as one of the keys to development. Raising the status of women is essential not only to decreasing population growth but to promoting a country’s economic and social progress. Gender roles are changeable or variable while sex differences and roles are fixed and cannot be changed. The Nigerian constitution upholds equal position and opportunities for men and women. By this, women acquire the same training alongside the opposite sex (male) and thus acquire the same experience

In gender roles, culture dictates how a man or woman should behave. This had led to a gender role stereotypes where society believes that some activities or occupations are specifically meant for a particular sex and not the other. The factors that influence gender roles in a society include: Economy, technology, education, and politics, among others.

Gender and Library Education

Librarians have made decisive contributions toward the development of the educational process. The establishment of an educational process based on the body of knowledge is the recognized responsibility of every professional group irrespective of

the gender. In the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, China and Japan, there are good library schools. In the United Kingdom, professional examinations of the Library Association as well as the first degree are entry qualifications for Librarianship or Information Science. In the United States of America, librarianship is a postgraduate program, which can be obtained in graduate Library Schools or in a graduate school of Library and Information Science. Nigeria has many Library and Information Science Schools, while some of the schools offer Bachelor of Library Science (BLS); others offer degrees at the postgraduate level, (Aguolu, 1986). Particularly in academic libraries in Nigeria, it is not an overstatement to say that the Heads of Libraries prefer to hire staff that have librarianship as a postgraduate course rather than a straight first degree, irrespective of their gender, (Falaiye, 2004).

Ononogbo and Falaiye (1992) examined the curriculum for library science education in the New Nigerian Standards. They compared the curriculum to a standard curriculum recommended by the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA). There was no gender difference because everything about the curriculum applies to both sexes (all students). There are universities like University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University, Bayero University, Imo State University, Delta State University, University of Maiduguri, among others, offering courses in Librarianship and some degrees up to the doctoral level.

Methodology

The data for the study was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed and administered in selected academic/university libraries. The questionnaire was meant to find out the composition of professional library staff in respect to gender. Questions were asked relating to highest qualifications and marital status. Other questions dealt with the number of years one had worked, current rank, how male colleagues viewed their female counterparts, and career advancement opportunities. In addition, interviews were held with some librarians. One source of data was the *Directory of Librarians* edited by Tamuno et. al. (1997). It was this source that made it possible to extract the relevant data in respect to professional librarians, academic librarians, and whether they are male or female.

Findings and Discussions

Sample and Respondents' Biographical Details

Out of one hundred and eighty (180) questionnaires sent, sixty (60) were returned, giving a response rate of 33.3%. The age of respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Age range	Percentage of Respondents
20 – 30	12
31 – 40	45
41 – 50	30
50+	13

For the purpose of analysis, respondents were grouped into two age ranges; 20-40 and 41 and above. Splitting the respondents into these two age groups meant that the number in each category was similar (57 and 43). Table 2 shows the gender distribution of male and female.

Table 2

Academic Staff	Male	% of Total	Female	% of Total
60	36	60%	24	40%

Available literature has shown a preponderance of female library practitioners in Britain and the United States of America but information has remained scanty with regards to the Nigerian gender prevalence situation.

Table 3 shows that majority of the sample are married. For the purpose of analysis, it was decided to retain only two categories: married and single (including others who had stated that they were divorced or separated and currently single to all intents and purposes)

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Percentage of Respondents
Single	28.3%
Married	66.7%
Others	5%

Qualifications and Motivation for Studying

The respondents were asked about their previous degree in order to ascertain their career history. The responses were varied so it was decided to group them into two

categories: Arts and Humanities, and Science. A large percentage of the females (80%) had an Arts and Humanities background while the males were more evenly split between the two with those with a Science background being in a slight majority. The respondents were given a selection of eight possible reasons for choosing librarianship as a career. They were asked to choose one or more statements that reflect their decision. As Table 4 shows, the desire to work with books/information was the most common response.

Table 4: Response for Choice of Career

Reasons	Total (%)	Males (%)	Female (%)
It can lead to a good career	16	20	15
Wanted to develop IT skills	10	17	9
Wanted to be a professional	12	12	12
Wanted to do a Masters degree	13	16	11
Personal interest in the field	14	7	15
Enjoy working with people	15	9	17
Enjoy working with books/information	20	20	20
Enjoy work experience	12	11	13

The desire to become a professional was strong among both males and females.

The respondents were questioned about their attitude to their career and work in general. As Table 5 indicates, the largest percentage of both males and females saw work as important as family/social life. A considerable higher percentage of females than males felt that social life/family life was more important.

Table 5: Work/Career Attitudes

Attitude	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
Work is the most important part of my life	7	9	4
Work is just a way of making money	3	8	2
Work is not as important as my social/family life	35	24	40
Work is as important as my social/family life	48	55	45

Table 6 shows that marital status also appeared to affect females' willingness to relocate, with fewer married females indicating that they would be willing to move to further their promotion prospects.

Table 6: Female respondents' willing to move geographically for job/promotion analyzed by marital status

	Married (%)	Single (%)
Willing	25	87
Unwilling	70	10
No response	5	3

Occupational Characteristics of Women Academic Librarians in Nigeria

All the women in the study were professionally qualified to be employed by the different university libraries. This finding also corroborates the findings of Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003). Their statistics indicated that women librarians in Kenya possess high qualifications, which compared favorably with those of their male counterparts.

Conception of Female Librarians by Male Counterparts

On the issue of whether the male counterparts of female librarians earned more for equal work done, the study revealed that there was no discrimination. While 95% of the respondents acknowledged there was no discrimination, 82.5% also stated that their male counterparts saw them as their equals. Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) reported that majority of the respondents observed that their pay package and other remuneration were not commensurate with work done. Similarly Gregory and

Ramirez (2000) expressed surprise that in 1999 in the United States of America, the average salary for women rose only 5.2% while that of men leaped by 12%.

Conclusion

Nigerian women have risen to the challenge. From the study, it can be concluded that the status of women librarians is under no threat in terms of remuneration and position. It is worthy to note that despite different obstacles, hindrances and barriers against women to participate effectively, they are still advancing professionally. Whether the female librarians advance in their career or not is entirely a decision of the professional women themselves. The study found little difference between male and female attitudes towards their careers in terms of ambition, aspiration or commitment. As was found in the study carried out by Jones and Oppenheim (2002) any obstacle perceived could be self-imposed. Gender equality is experienced as men and women with the same education and training now compete for advertised positions. In Nigeria, the culture of librarianship recognizes that librarians are united in the occupation regardless of their sex.

Despite the above, women still need encouragement through sound educational counseling to assist in eliminating or reducing any psychological barriers affecting them (Falaiye, 2004). Employers should make social amenities more available and change some organizational structures to be more flexible. Women should not be asked to alter their attitudes towards their families, children and wider social commitments (Jones and Goulding, 1999). The attitudes of women should be incorporated into the job at the different cadres of managerial levels. In a write-up by Orisahawo, (1990) a former Nigerian Head of State, Babangida stated that the African continent has all along underutilized the potential of its women. The development of a nation will be carried out in partnership with women and no gender should be seen as either the senior or junior partner in a relationship. In fact, we need to perceive the world through women's eyes rather than holding a mirror up to men (Wilson, 1995).

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