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**An Appraisal of Ethical Values in Librarians’
Code of Ethics in Nigeria**

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Abstract

Ethical values underline actions adjudged to be morally right and good and conforming to acceptable standards of behaviour. This paper looks at ethical values and attempts an analysis of the Librarians Code of Ethics of the Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) for librarians in Nigeria. The various ethical elements of the Code of Ethics is highlighted in reference to their relationship to universal ethical values and standards. By reviewing literature, the paper highlights principal ethical values in light of the LRCN code of ethics for librarians and information professionals. The paper also stresses the relevance of a professional code of ethics. The paper recommended, among others that the LRCN should educate library and information professionals on the significance of conducting their professional affairs in accordance with prescribed ethical standards and values of the profession, and to review the language of the Code to Ethics in order to constrain compliance.

Keywords: Ethics, Code of Ethics, library and information profession, LRCN, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Ethical values deal with principles of rightness of conduct and behaviour. It underlines actions adjudged to be morally right and good and conforming to acceptable standards of behaviour. Most organisations have recognized the importance of codifying ethical values that guide their profession and have thus captured in formal terms the ethical values that are relevant to their practice, into a code of ethics.

Code of ethics is a guide to professional ethical conduct and behaviour. A code of ethics emphasises the statement of the profession's values regarding right conduct. A code of ethics underlines the values that govern the conduct and behavior of people in reference to issues of rightness and wrongness, virtuousness and viciousness (Ochulor, 2011).

Library and information professionals play important roles as they are usually the essential link between information users and the information which they require and therefore occupy a privileged position which carries corresponding responsibilities (CILIP 2012). A code of ethics provide the basis for taking responsibility as information providers. Professionals need a code of ethics to manage their practice ethically and to gain respectability from the world they serve and to maintain a consistent behaviour to set ethical standards. In accordance to these, the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria has a formal document labelled the 'Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for Librarians in Nigeria'. By this code library and information professionals are sworn 'to serve people through the provision of access to quality information resources in either print or electronic formats through which people's standard of living are improved, dreams are actualized, education is sustained, sound decisions are made and executed, freedom of expression is enhanced and information resources are preserved for posterity' (LRCN Librarians' Code of Ethics, 2013).

Concept of Ethics

The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which means "custom". It shares an equivalent meaning with yet another word "mores", which means "customs" or "habits". Sometimes the two words are used interchangeably to mean "customs, habits and acceptable ways of behaviour of an individual or a community" (Ocholor, 2011). Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the rightness or wrongness of human action. As part of philosophy, it provides the undercurrent of rationality and logicity in the admissibility of moral codes, mores and behavioural patterns. Rubin (2000) insists that ethics provide a framework for conducting essential information functions, instituting policies and developing strategies for service. Ethics deals with judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuousness or viciousness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions (Ocholor, 2011 citing Ozumba, 2004). Sultana (2014) sees it in this light when he defined professional ethics as a set of standards adopted by a professional community. He

further posits that professional ethics are regulated by standards, which are often referred to as codes of ethics.

Ethical Values

Ethical values pertain to principles of rightness of conduct and behaviour. It underlines actions adjudged to be morally right and good and conforming to acceptable standards of behaviour. In ethics, value denotes something's degree of importance, with the aim of determining what action of life is best to do or live. It deals with right conduct and good life, in the sense that a valuable action may be regarded as ethically good and an action of relatively low value may be regarded as bad. Onuoma & Nwachukwu (2012) see ethical values as moral principles, standards, ideals, traditions, code of conduct, norms, etiquette, and so on, that moderate behaviour. They insist that ethics and values may be used interchangeably. Most organisations have recognized the importance of codifying ethical values that guide their profession and have thus captured in formal terms ethical values relevant in their practice into a code of ethics.

Concept of Ethics in Library and Information Profession

Professionals are skilful persons having experiences relevant to their professions and from whom a high standard of behaviour is expected. Professionalism demands mental orientation, career dressing, self-comportment, integrity, discipline, self-respect and work ethics. It requires loyalty, commitment or dedication, hard work, efficiency and productivity. Professionalism stresses efficient labour and qualitative service or performance (Dzurgba, 2011).

The proliferation of information in different formats and the attendant complexity in retrieval processes have promoted and sustained the need for society to share resources, work, ideas and information. This provides the rationale for library and information practice (LRCN Code of Ethics). Library and information professionals are sworn to providing needed information to the

general public as much and as timely as possible without recourse to any form of prejudice or bias. They have a special obligation to support and promote the acquisition and equitable dissemination of quality information to present and future generations (Adejumo and Oye, 2015). Library and information professionals are usually the essential link between information users and the information which they require and therefore occupy a privileged position which carries corresponding responsibilities (CILIP 2012).

Code of Ethics

One of the key elements that identifies a 'profession' is the existence of an effective code of conduct, which is regarded as an important way to enhance the status of the profession; it can provide a strong central defining function, contributing to the overall identity of the profession itself and outlines the general principles of professional behaviour which should be followed by members of the association in order to act in an appropriately moral way and to avoid the risk of misconduct (IFLA 2012). A code of ethics is a list of guiding principles for ethical behavior. Sultana (2014) asserts that a code of ethics is very important because it gives professionals boundaries that professionals have to stay within in their professional practice. Feather & Sturges (2003) provide that a code of ethics is a set of standards of ethical behaviour expected of individual members of a professional association. They further posit that codes are issued by professional bodies to establish and encourage the highest possible standards of conduct by members in their performance of their duties. Shachaf (2005) citing Farrell & Cobbin (2000) argues that through the presence of a code of ethics, a professional association signals its members' competence and integrity, and it provides social legitimization to its members.

Professional code is seen by Ball & Oppenheim (2005) primarily as a supporting tool, a 'framework' to help information professionals manage the responsibilities and sensitivities which figure prominently in their work. Rubin (2000) insists on the importance of a professional codes on the following four reasons: (1) they represent a statement of the fundamental values of the

profession; (2) they are useful in teaching new librarians about the fundamental values of the profession; (3) reading (and rereading) them and listening to other professionals discuss and apply provisions of a code promotes the assimilation of important professional values and (4) when particularly knotty ethical issues arise and important ethical concerns may be ignored, the professional code can serve as a decision-making guide and a jog for one's conscience. Suitana 2014 citing Harris (1995) also highlights the relevance of a code of ethics as follows: (1) It serves as a collective recognition by members for its responsibility; (2) it helps to create the environment where ethical behavior is a norm; (3) It can act as a guide in many situations; (4) It serves as a process of developing and modifying the code of ethics; (5) It acts as an educational tool to give focus point in classes and meetings; (6) It indicates to others that the profession is concerned about responsible and professional conduct. Codes of professional ethics for library organizations typically address the core issues of information ethics, such as intellectual freedom and intellectual property. They also address principles of professional ethics more generally, such as the treatment of employees and professional development (Fallis, 2005). Farrell & Cobbin (2000) cited in Shachaf (2005) identifies three types of code of ethics; aspirational (inspirational), regulatory (prescriptive) and educational. Inspirational codes are intended to empower individuals to be ethical; they present the ideal that individuals should attempt to reach. Prescriptive codes provide detailed set of values for ethical behaviour. These codes describe the behavioural outcomes required as a response to certain circumstances. The rules in these codes are solutions to ethical dilemmas. The third type: Educational, may contain inspirational and prescriptive elements; they also provide explanations and example; they substantiate their principles with commentary and interpretation. Farrell & Cobbin (2000) conclude that many libraries code of ethics are both inspirational and educational. It is through persuasion and professional discussion that the information profession attempts to promote ethical conduct.

Elements of Ethical Values in Professionalism

A number of professional organizations define their ethical values as a number of discrete components. Typically these include: honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, confidentiality, objectivity, respectfulness, and obedience to the law. Dzurgba (2011) highlights the ethical values of professionalism to include responsibility, accountability, honesty and integrity. The Institute of Global Ethics (2015) highlights the following ethical values: honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness, and compassion.

Responsibility: responsibility means a duty one has because one is in charge of, or one looks after something, so that one makes decisions and can be blamed if anything goes wrong (Dzurgba, 2011). It means accepting the costs, and obligations for decisions made. Josephson Institute of Ethics (2010) emphasise that responsibility means being accountable for what we do and who we are. Our capacity to reason and our freedom to choose, make us morally autonomous and, therefore, answerable for whether we honour or degrade the ethical principles that give life meaning and purpose. Libraries provide services to users without discrimination in reference to their level of education, gender, race, creed, religion, disability, and age. It is also the responsibility of librarians to remain relevant by keeping themselves current in their respective areas of librarianship. They also have the responsibility to instruct the community in which they serve on the use of information resources and teach library users information literacy skills to empower them to become lifelong learners. This responsibility also extend to the selection, preservation, and dissemination of information, and the need to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Accountability: Webster's Third World International Dictionary of the English Language defines accountably as answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account-giving. Ssonko, (2010) insists that accountability means answerability for action carried out and performance achieved to other relevant and concerned authorities outside his/her department or organization; it is therefore an ethical virtue, since ethics concern principles and rules that govern

the moral value of people's behaviour. Dzurgba, (2011) also provides that accountability encourages loyalty, commitment, diligence, efficiency, and productivity, and it stresses hard work and result-oriented performance. In the performance of their tasks, librarians must therefore act in a professionally accountable way. This suggest that laxity, carelessness, negligence and casualness in the execution of their duties would be counted as contrary to their obligation as they relate to library users, to colleagues and the organization. Chapter three of the Code of Ethics of the LRCN clearly spells out librarians' obligations towards the library user, to the library profession, with colleagues, and other stakeholders

Integrity: In ethics, integrity is regarded as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one's actions. Integrity can be regarded as the opposite of hypocrisy. Dzurgba (2011) posits that integrity encompasses dignity, honour and respect. Duggar citing Turknett, (n.d.) posits that integrity is the foundation of leadership and it involves a careful balance between respect and responsibility. It connotes adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty (Martin, 2008). Ssonko (2010) believes that the concept of integrity has to do with perceived consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcome. Individuals that have integrity build trust in their relations with others; they become valued as friends, colleagues, mentors, and supervisors, and are respected and counted on to do what is right, and are able to balance respect and responsibility, and they are able to share their values with others (Duggar, 2011).

Library and information managers should fulfil their obligations in accordance to the principles of openness, transparency, accountability and impartiality. Annegarn, Berends, Evertsen, Gommer, Greidanus & Helder (2001) insist that in giving information, a librarian uses clear criteria to select information and information sources, and chooses suppliers exclusively on the basis of the quality of goods and services, and also strongly denounces censorship in all measures. Thus, it is imperative that librarians base their operations on integrity.

Honesty

Honesty entails playing by the rules, without stealing, cheating, fraud, subterfuge and other trickery (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2010). Honesty demands that “you should not obtain your ends through lying and deceitful practices and you have a responsibility to keep your promises” (Kidder, 1995 cited in Welford, 1998). Honesty is a fundamental ethical value that contains three dimensions: truthfulness (presenting the facts to the best of our knowledge), sincerity (genuineness, being without trickery or duplicity, and precludes all acts, including half-truths, out-of-context statements, and even silence, that are intended to create beliefs or leave impressions that are untrue or misleading, and candor (forthrightness and frankness, imposing the obligation to volunteer information that another person needs to know) (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2010). Dzurgba (2011) posits that an honest person exhibits high moral qualities like truthfulness, faithfulness, loyalty, humility, trustworthiness, tolerance, fairness, justice, impartiality, discipline, and transparency in thoughts, motives, words, relationships and interactions.

Compassion: means a sympathetic response to the sufferings of others. Compassion as a moral emotion is intimately tied to the question of ethics and the cultivation of ethical sensibility. Compassion is a deep feeling of wishing to alleviate the suffering of others (Ozawa-de Silva, Dodson-Lavelle, Raison & Negi, 2012). Compassion can serve as a fundamental basis for human values and ethics, precisely because a central problem of ethics is suffering and well-being. When compassion is present in a person’s mind, that person cannot harm or further the suffering of the people to whom they feel compassion; on the contrary, their actions will work towards the alleviation of those persons’ suffering.

Empathy is a crucial ingredient and basis for feeling compassion for others. Compassion involves the following aspects: a cognitive aspect (recognizing suffering in oneself or another), an affective aspect (a sense of concern or affection for the other), an aspirational or motivational aspect (one wishes to relieve the suffering of the other), an attentional aspect (one’s degree of immersion and focus), and a behavioral aspect (a compassionate response; an action that stems from compassion) (Ozawa-de Silva, et al, 2012). Compassion appears to be the most stable foundation for a secular

ethics that transcends religious, cultural, and philosophical divides, because it is based on the fundamental human aspirations to have happiness and avoid suffering

Compassion and solidarity imply assistance and cooperation in spite of personal or political differences. Librarians should employ elements of compassion as they relate to the society they serve; not discriminating in the selection of information sources as they serve their obligation as mediators between the demand the supply of information in formats that users need.

Respect

Respect is about honouring the essential worth and dignity of all people, including oneself. We are morally obligated to treat everyone with respect, regardless of who they are and what they have done (Holistic Education Network, 2002). Britzman & Hanson (2005) instructively insist that librarians have a responsibility to be the best we can be in all situations, even when dealing with unpleasant people, as respect focuses on civility, courtesy and decency. Virtually all ethical behaviour includes respect or tolerance, and underlines the right to be treated with dignity and respect, including tolerance of differing viewpoints (Wolford, 1998).

Respect suggests that librarians should have regard for, and have esteem for library users, accommodating cultural, ethnic and religious differences.

Fairness and Equity: means to be objective, impartial and free from discrimination.

Wolord (1998) emphasises that a simplistic approach to fairness is the Golden Rule. Fairness promotes equality of action regardless of specific circumstances. Librarians are expected to treat all users equally and to maintain an open access to information for all categories of people.

An Appraisal of Ethical Values in the LRCN Code of Ethics

To guide members' behaviors and to regulate the professional activities of members, professional associations and organizations establish codes of ethics. These codes aim to deal with ethical issues that are not addressed by the domain of codified law but that should not be left to the domain of free choice. A code of ethics is a formal statement of the profession's values regarding ethical behaviors.

The code of ethics focuses on principles and values that govern the behavior of a person or group with respect to what is right or wrong. These codes support a more ethical work environment and also set high standards against which individuals can measure their performance and express the value system of the profession to those outside the professional organization (Shachaf (2005) citing Vanasco, 1994).

The code of ethics for librarians in Nigeria is divided into three chapters. Chapter one contains the preamble, the vision and mission statement, objectives of the code of conduct and librarians code of conduct. Chapter one also highlights the duties of the Librarians' Investigation Panel and the Librarians' Disciplinary Committee. Penalties for unprofessional conduct are also contained in this chapter. Chapter two covers the principles of professionalization of librarianship in Nigeria by defining who a librarian is, the legal requirements for practicing librarianship, obligations of librarians, rights and privileges of registered librarians, professional conduct of librarians, among others. Chapter three contains issues relating to relationships. This comprises relationship with the user, with the profession, with colleagues, with publishers, library suppliers and software vendors, relationship towards documents and information, relationship with society. It also contains a general section which outlines interpretation and review of the code.

The universal ethical values of responsibility, accountability, honesty, integrity, respect, fairness, and compassion underlines the ethical principles captured in the Code. These ethical principles captured under the relationship clauses highlight free equitable access to information, opposition to censorship of information, promotion of inclusion, confidentiality (privacy), respect, opposition to corrupt practices, promotion of information literacy, promotion of transparency, among others.

Table 1 below shows some principal ethical values and their association to the LRCN Code of Ethics for Librarians in Nigeria.

Table 1: Universal Ethical Values in the LRCN Code of Ethics

Relationship with Users	Universal Ethical Values	Ethical Principles in the LRCN Code of Ethics	
	Integrity	Discourages corrupt practices	
	Accountability and responsibility	Encourages transparency	
	Compassion		Promotion of inclusion
			Promotion of information literacy
	Fairness, equity		Free and equal access to information
			Opposition to censorship
Respect		Confidentiality (privacy)	
Relationship with Library Profession, Colleagues and Other Libraries	Integrity	Motivation	
		Discourages misconduct	
	Responsibility	Academic development and innovation	
		Positive image for the library	
	Compassion	Staff development	
		Constructive criticism	
		Resource sharing	
		Cooperation	
	Fairness, equity	Opposition to discrimination	
		Fair share of work load	
	Respect	Team work	
		Confidentiality	
Relationship with publishers, library suppliers, software vendors and towards information	Integrity/ Responsibility	Selection of materials	
	Integrity	Opposition to personal gratification	
	Fairness, equity	Opposition to censorship	
		Opposition to partiality	
	Respect	Collection development	
		Copyright protection	
		Encourage tolerance	
Responsibility	Preservation		
Compassion	Library cooperation		

Table 1 highlights the reflection of universal ethical values in the LRCN Code of Ethics. The table underlines the broad areas in the LRCN Code of Ethics which highlights relationships with users, relationships with professional colleagues and other libraries, and relationships with publishers, library suppliers etc. From the table, the ethical concept of integrity is seen to influence librarians’ relationship with users in discouraging corrupt practices. Integrity is also shown to promote motivation as librarians work with professional colleagues and other libraries. In reference to

relationship with publishers, library suppliers etc, integrity influences the selection of materials and frowns at personal gratification. In the same vein, Table 1 shows that accountability and responsibility underlines transparency, academic development, selection of materials, and preservation of materials. Compassion underlines the promotion of inclusion, constructive criticism, resource sharing, cooperation, etc. Table 1 also shows that fairness/equity drives free and equal access to information, opposition to censorship, opposition to discrimination, opposition to partiality, fairness in collection development. Table 1 shows that the ethical value of respect underscores confidentiality, teamwork, copyright protection, and tolerance.

The LRCN Code of Ethics clearly expresses the ethical standards of behaviour expected of library and information professionals. It is very broadly written and conventional, capturing the various relationships that library and information professionals have with various stakeholders who are affected by the actions and activities of library and information professionals.

The Code is aspirational in style, and couched in non-mandatory terms, it therefore does not handle concrete and real situations. Its aspirational nature also makes it incapable of dictating behaviour that covers particular situations. This also weakens its power to sanction unethical conduct.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Code of ethics is a guide to professional ethical conduct and behaviour. A code of ethics emphasises the statement of the profession's values regarding right conduct. The LRCN Code of Ethics aims at upholding the library and information profession in Nigeria. The Code ensures that librarians and information professionals in Nigeria engage in ethically professional practice.

With the pervasiveness of information, there is the need to improve the awareness of library and information professionals in reference to the ethical scope and legal framework of their work in order to appreciate clearly the many ethical dimensions in the provision of information.

Based on the review, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Librarians' Registration Council (LRCN) needs to educate library and information professionals on the value of conducting their professional affairs in accordance with prescribed ethical standards of the profession.
2. The Librarians' Registration Council code of ethics should be written in obligatory and mandatory language in order to constrain compliance.
3. The Librarians' Registration Council code of ethics should provide practical solutions to concrete ethical issues relating to core ethical principles.

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