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Academic Status and the Doctoral Degree Requirement for Promotion of Librarians in Nigerian University Libraries

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Introduction

Librarianship is an academic profession. The stock-in-trade is knowledge: the selection, collection, organization, and transmission of knowledge. It has many things in common with the teaching profession. Hence, Dahiru, and Benson (2006) posit that, "to effectively plan their roles as academics, librarians are expected to teach, conduct research, and disseminate their findings as well as carry out administrative duties." The term "librarian" is often incorrectly used to refer to anyone who works in a library. Professional librarians are those who have obtained a first degree in library and information science or in any subject field and a master's degree in library and information science in a recognized university. As with most professional degrees, librarians have the duty of contributing to their profession through writing and publication, and attendance and participation at professional conferences. Kaniki (1991) states that to maintain professionalism, a given profession must consciously work toward maintaining and refining the achieved status and other professional traits.

The question of whether the librarians in the universities should be accorded academic status has been settled in Nigerian universities. Ochai (1998) reports that a circular issued by National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1993 directed all federal universities to accord academic status to librarians in appointment and promotion. Librarians are now required to publish as a prerequisite for promotion, in the same way as their counterparts in the classroom. Until recently, a PhD was never a part of the requirements for librarian promotion. All that was required is a first degree in any field and a master's degree in librarianship, as well as a record of publication. Now, however, in some university libraries in Nigeria librarians are now being required to possess a PhD before they can be promoted or even be offered appointment.

Many librarians are not prepared for this, and even if they were, there are impediments to pursuing a PhD program in Nigerian universities. There are only one or two universities in Nigeria that offer library and information science at the PhD level. The few that are available can only take a few students at a time. Unlike their teaching counterparts who can easily pursue a PhD in their teaching departments, librarians must travel far from their workplaces to acquire this diploma, with the exception of a few lucky ones who work in the universities where the program is offered.

Literature Review

Akinyotu (1982) submits that university librarianship in Nigeria started with a big advantage, because when academic status for university librarians was still been debated in other countries, librarians in what was then the only Nigerian university college (now University of Ibadan) had already been accorded the status. This status was later eroded with the release of Udoji Report in 1975, which categorized librarians as non-academic staff. The recognition of librarians as academics did not come until after a protracted battle and the subsequent agreement between the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Federal Government (Egunjobi 2001).

The literature reveals that while there are many publications on academic status of librarians, including discussion of the research and publication requirement, there has not been much on the idea of requiring a doctorate, because the issue is a new phenomenon in Nigerian universities. A general survey of developed nations reveals that in the US and Canada, a librarian normally has one or two-year masters degree in library and information science (called an MLS, MALIS, MSLS, MIS, MS-LIS, MIS, MLIS, or MILS) from a program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). In the UK, a librarian can have a three- or four-year bachelor's degree in library and information studies or information sciences and separate master's degrees in librarianship, archives management, and records management. In the UK, these degrees are accredited by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals and the Society of Archivists. In Germany, the first step for an academic librarian is a PhD in a subject field, followed by additional training in librarianship. In Australia, graduates with a doctorate in library and information science usually become teaching faculty members in schools of library and information science or directors or deans of university libraries ("Librarian," 2007).

Writing on librarians in Ghana, Kadiri (2000) observes that even though librarians want academic status, they are found wanting in the area of research and publications. Ekoja and Oji (1999), however, state that attention is less focused on the issue of academic status of Nigerian university librarians because virtually all universities have accorded this status to their librarians; rather, the focus is now on whether there is justification for the status or not. Lungu (1995) reports that librarians in Copperbelt University in Zambia justify academic status by adopting a proactive approach to their responsibilities. This approach resulted in the university librarian being given the rank of professor. Examining the situation in Nigeria, Omoniwa (2003) submits that some of the new requirements for librarians constitute the pain of the new status, which now includes higher degrees, particularly a doctorate. The issue of the PhD degree is left for individual universities to decide, but a review of some advertisements reveals that possession of PhD is now one of the requirements for the appointment of university librarians. While some universities are already implementing this, others are still buying time. Onohwakpor and Tiemo (2006) opine that academic status had caused some setbacks for librarians, making it appear that the gains have been swallowed up by the pains. Are librarians adequately prepared for academic status? The benefits are accompanied by new expectations. The requirements to qualify for these benefits constitute the pains of the new status. These new requirements include a bachelor degree, a master's degree, publications in reputable professional journals, and now a PhD in some universities.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- to examine whether or not Nigerian university libraries have introduced the PhD as a requirement for the promotion of academic librarians
- to discover reaction of academic librarians to the issue.

Methodology

Data for this study was gathered with a questionnaire. Some were posted to university libraries, and many were distributed among academic librarians in Nigerian university libraries during conferences, seminars, and workshops in late 2007 and early 2008. A total of 200 copies were distributed, out of which 180 copies were returned and found usable. The questionnaire was aimed at eliciting information from academic librarians on whether or not a doctoral degree is being used as a criterion for promotion in their universities, and, if so, at what level is it being used and what is their perception of it?

Findings/Discussions

General information regarding academic qualifications, status, and years of experience at the place of work of the respondents was sought. The results showed that out of the 180 respondents, 167 (94%) have MLS degree, 6 (3%) have BLS degree and 7 (4%) are PhD degree holders. The study also revealed that there a gender disparity among the respondents: 135 (75%) respondents were male, and 45 (25%) respondents were female

Table I: Categories of Respondents

Status	Frequency	%
University Librarian	2	1.1
Deputy University Librarian	4	2.2
Principal Librarian	20	11
Senior Librarian	50	28
Librarian I	36	20
Librarian II	60	33.3
Assistant Librarian	6	3.3
No status	2	1.1
Total	180	100

The table shows that the largest category of respondents were Librarian II (33.3%), followed closely by Senior Librarian (28%). Two of the respondents did not indicate their status. The result indicates that most respondents have not reached the peak of their career, and are still subject to promotion.

Table II: Criteria for Promotion in Nigerian University Libraries

Criterion	Frequency	%
Qualification	135	16
Number of years since last promotion	120	14
Job performance	116	13.5
Additional qualification	110	13
Publications	150	17
Community service	114	13.2
Conference/workshop attendance	115	13.3
Total	860	100

Respondents were asked to indicate as many options as applicable. The most common criteria for promotion is publications representing, 17 percent, followed by qualification, at 16 percent, and number of years since last promotion, 14 percent.

Table III. Doctorate as Requirement for Promotion

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	50	28
No	80	44
Undecided	50	28
Total	180	100

Responding to whether a PhD is now compulsory for promotion of librarians, Table III shows that 50 (28%) indicated that their universities have made the acquisition of PhD compulsory for promotion while 80 (44%) answered negatively. Fifty (28%) respondents did not respond to the question. Only one university (University of Lagos) has made acquisition of PhD compulsory at Librarian II level, which means that, to be employed as a librarian in the University, one must have a PhD, since Librarian II is the entry point for an academic librarian. Other respondents indicated that a doctorate is compulsory at Principal Librarian level, which is an equivalent to the level of Senior lecturer for the teaching staff.

Asked whether a PhD should be compulsory, 60 (33 %) agreed, while 110 (61%) said “no,” and 10 (6%) did not respond. Reasons given for this response include:

- Librarianship is a profession, whose terminal degree is a masters in library science, and not a PhD.
- Attainment of a doctorate is not a predictor or prerequisite of job performance.
- Since librarians cannot become professors, there is no need for a PhD.
- Librarians are supporting academic staff and not core academic staff.

Those who felt that PhD should be compulsory argued that:

- There cannot be two types of academic staff. Therefore, all academic staff should be treated equally and librarians must possess a doctorate.
- Acquiring a PhD will improve research skill of academic librarians.

One respondent argued that for self actualization, a librarian might want to pursue a doctorate, but it should never be made mandatory.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The academic status conferred on librarians in Nigerian universities has no doubt helped in the development of the profession. Agboola (2000) observes that Nigerian librarians have been active in research and publication to the extent that apart from South Africa, Nigerian university librarians enjoy prominence in the professional literatures. Higher qualifications are vital to capacity building and skill development. The higher the qualification the more the skills and exposure that one acquires, and when this is combined with interest, intellect, and experience of the individual, the success could be outstanding.

Librarians in Nigerian universities have shown themselves to be capable scholars who have the ability to acquire a doctoral degree. The problem is whether there are available facilities for them to

acquire it. Even after acquiring it, would they enjoy the full benefit? In Nigerian university libraries (with the exception of the University of Calabar) there can only be one University Librarian and one or two Deputy University Librarians at a time. Others would have to remain at the Principal Librarian level. Among teaching staff, there can only be one Vice-Chancellor at a time, but there can be as many professors as qualified in a department or faculty. If the PhD degree is made compulsory for university librarians the following recommendations are therefore given:

- Librarians should be given adequate time to acquire a doctoral degree.
- Incentives such as study leave, financial assistance, etc., should be given to academic librarians to facilitate the acquisition of a PhD.
- The Association of Nigerian University Librarians should work with the few library schools offering a doctorate to allocate more places to the university librarians who want to pursue a PhD.
- Fellowships could be granted to University librarians who want to study abroad.
- Academic librarians should be able to enjoy the same benefits as their teaching counterparts.

Requiring a doctorate for librarians to be promoted in most Nigerian universities is still a knotty issue and needs more deliberation and clarification. Unless this situation is reviewed, librarians may be deprived of job satisfaction and may leave the university system.

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