Status and identity of law librarianship in Nigeria

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This paper investigates the status and identity of law librarians in Nigeria. The objective is to identify, discuss and review literature on the educational requirements, professional regulation, labour market, salaries, associations, labour union and research study of the law librarians. The population for this study consists of six interviewed law librarians that were selected from University Library; Nigerian Law School; Judiciary; a law firm; public service library; and a publishing house in Nigeria. Face to face interview was used to collect data from the six respondents.

Keywords: Law Libraries – Nigeria. Law Librarians – Nigeria.

Status e identidade da Biblioteconomia Jurídica na Nigéria

Pesquisa sobre o status e a identidade dos bibliotecários jurídicos na Nigéria. O objetivo é identificar, discutir e produzir uma revisão de literatura sobre os requisitos educacionais, regulamentação profissional, mercado de trabalho, salários, associações, sindicatos e trabalhos de pesquisa dos bibliotecários jurídicos. O método utilizado consistiu de seis entrevistas realizadas com bibliotecários jurídicos oriundos de Biblioteca Universal; Faculdade de Direito da Nigéria; judiciário; escritório de advocacia; biblioteca pública; e uma editora na Nigéria.

1 INTRODUCTION

The library houses all information materials on a variety of subjects and electronic information resources. The sources are arranged on shelves in a well-organized way to enable readers to access them, with little or no payment. The primary objective of the library is to provide users with free access to the information kept therein. A law library consists of legal materials housed in a building under the management of its parent organizations which includes: commercial house law library, in-house law library, and Ministry of Justice library. The legal materials are primarily organized to enable easy access and use by law students, judges, lawyers, law teachers, and researchers. Olorunfemi (2014) posits that law libraries contain processed and well-organized materials that cover all law subject areas, as well as, computer-generated or digital libraries. Anyaegbu et al. (2013) refer to law library as the place where legal professional and students are served and encouraged to interact with legal information for study, research and professional purposes. The objective of this library is to provide current and relevant legal information for users of legal materials. Law libraries are generally established as attachment to law faculties, court libraries and other relevant organizations to provide legal information services (Olorunfemi, 2014).

Dada (1998) cited in Ali, Owoeye and Anasi, (2010) explains that law libraries are special hybrid of librarianship. The law libraries are regarded as special hybrid library because of the mixture of both traditional print legal resources and the growing number of electronic resources (law databases) available in there. Hybrid library is commonly used by librarians to describe such libraries because of the role played in providing access to print and electronic sources (Malinconico, 2002). Librarians provide access to both legal information sources (print), law databases and electronic information resources required for legal studies and administration of justice (Akinwumi, 2015). Akinwumi (2015, p.1) posits in a paper delivered on The use of ICT in delivery of law library services for innovative legal education and training that, law libraries play dominant roles in providing access to print and electronic information, teaching and research of academic institutions. The American Association of Law Libraries (2014) also explains that, law libraries provide law sources, while law librarians enable access to the e-sources and also guide users in locating relevant legal information sources. Hence, Malomo and Sholaja (2001) explain that law librarianship is sine qua non to the administration of justice and legal studies in Nigeria.
Librarianship emanated from the era when paper, writing and printing were discovered between 1450 and 1455 AD by Johannes Gutenberg, who printed the first texts (Meggs and Purvis, 2006). Librarianship’s developments have since accelerated and continued to widely grow as a profession. This growth can be seen in the continued procurement, organization and dissemination of information sources and related materials to users in the library. However in the context of law librarianship as an aspect of the librarianship, it has developed to be the mixture of legal profession and librarianship. As observed by Anyaegbu et al. (2013), interdependent relationship existed between librarianship and law, because law is a profession that widely nourished on information that is normally provided by the libraries and law librarians.

A law librarian is a legal information professional, who works in various legal settings, including law schools, private law firms, and government libraries (The Legal Information Professional, 2016). The term, law librarian is generally used to describe or identify the librarians attached to law library to operate and provide access to legal sources housed in law libraries. In other words, law librarians are the persons who work to provide access to information sources and resources in law libraries. Anyaegbu et al., (2013) studied “law libraries in information age: the role of academic law librarians”, the study found out that, law librarianship is yet to be accepted as a profession, just like other professions (medicine, law and accountancy) in Nigeria. Based on Anyaegbu et al.’s findings, this paper investigates status and identity of law librarians in Nigeria. In this paper, we reviewed literature on law librarians’ educational qualifications, legal requirements, professional activities, professional regulations, labour markets, salaries, associations, labour unions and national research. The study also interviews six law librarians serving in different law libraries in Nigeria.

2 EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF LAW LIBRARIANS

It is germane for the law librarians to possess certain educational qualification to be recognized as the librarians in charge of law libraries. The educational qualification for the law librarians is the same as that of the American Library Association’s policy on librarianship. The policy maintains that “A master’s level program in library and information studies as accredited or recognized by the appropriate national body of any country is the appropriate professional degree for librarians” (American Library Association, 2016). This mean that every undergraduate study programs (art, music, law, psychology, medicine and so on) can be used for entrance into master’s program.
in library and information studies. In which case, anyone with any subject background is allowed to study librarianship at the master level, regardless of their subject background at undergraduate level. In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission is the national body that accredit master degree program in librarianship as the appropriate educational qualification for the librarians. Additionally, the Nigerian Library Association also expected that librarians should also register with them as Chartered Librarians before they can practice in Nigeria.

American Library Association (2016) posits that, it depending on each country, in addition to the MLS degree; a Juris Doctorate degree is sometimes required for librarians working in public service, administrative positions in academic law libraries and some law firm libraries. According to American Library Association (2016), positions in technical services department and many law firm libraries do not require a Juris Doctorate degree to be recognized as professional law librarians in Nigeria. The Council of Legal Education however, recommends that, the law librarian should hold a degree in Law, in addition to the master’s degree in Library and Information Studies. Therefore, the qualification required to work as a law librarian is a master’s in library science (MLS) from an American Library Association accredited library school. One of the six respondents explain that, ‘Nigeria has several accredited library schools that offer master’s programs, but there is no institution offering any specialized courses for law librarianship.’ Thus, to be a qualified law librarian, the candidate must be a qualified lawyers and librarians in Nigeria. Dada (2011) studied Law Librarianship and Legal Research in the Digital Age, the study indicated that a professional law librarian must have good subject background in Law and Librarianship. Dada (2011) envisioned that higher degrees in master and doctoral levels would be more appropriate to be a law librarian. Based on educational parity of the lecturers and the librarians in the academic environment, it is pertinent for law librarians to have the two qualifications, because of the equal status between the Lecturers and the Librarians, which requires parallel and compatible qualifications that eliminate any discrepancy and imbalance in the status and quality of their education. Dada (2011) further explains that lecturers and librarians perform their functions on equal footings, and that neither of them operates from the position of incapacity in terms of qualifications. Thus, every practising law librarians are expected to be experienced librarians and qualified members of the law faculty that can be designated to head any law libraries in Nigeria.
3 ROLE OF THE LAW LIBRARIANS

The law librarians are expected to possess good knowledge of current developments in law and librarianship. The role of the law librarian in the electronic information environment cannot be over-emphasized. Roles as outlined by Leiter (2007) cited in Anyaegbu et al., (2013) includes: evaluating the quality of print and electronic information sources; teaching legal research methodology; participate in their institution assignments to meet the law library task and other requirements to be competent and diligent scholars. Akinwumi (2015) noted that law librarians in academic environments also teach legal research, create student-oriented research guides, supports students in the libraries, offer new services to meet student needs, provide trainings, and also guide organization and use of legal resources.

Onoyeya and Ajayi (2015, p. 45) emphasize that law librarians are expected to have double degrees, specialized knowledge and expertise of legal sources and resources, and competencies in both Law and Librarianship. This is because, possession of academic and professional qualifications enable the law librarians to carry out their specialized tasks, facilitate ability to teach, conduct research and publish in appropriate academic journals. This will cause them to be at equal level with colleagues in other disciplines. Based on these factors, it can be said that appropriate academic and professional qualifications are important factors that can facilitate successful implementation of professional responsibilities. According to Dada (2011), the professional law librarians would be able to hold useful discussions with colleagues and published research results like other faculty members.

4 PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Every year, members of the Nigerian Library Association meet for their annual conferences and workshops that involve active discussions about the new trend in librarianship, that is, information technologies, provision of relevant legal sources and access to legal information sources and resources. The association’s members includes, library staff representatives from public libraries, government, private, higher institutions, Nigerian law schools, private law firms, courts and other establishments that have libraries in the country. In one spirit, the association members share information and experiences in their libraries. The library program enlightens members on the specific ways of information provision and access to variety of information sources.
Based on the preeminent importance, the conference identifies several challenges and opportunities that librarians generally required to work on, to provide access to all information. This challenge includes lack of qualified librarians, ICT and technical staff, the need for training and re-training of the library staffs in all libraries, including law libraries. Opportunities occur in the area in which members of the Nigerian Librarian Association shared their knowledge and experience with other members for the development of the libraries.

Law Librarians as registered members of Nigerian Library Association also actively participate in the librarians’ professional activities. The law librarians at this forum also identify and discuss common challenges and opportunities for their libraries regardless of library type, whether academic law library, private law library or court library.

5 LEGAL REQUIREMENT AND THE LAW THAT REGULATE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF LAW LIBRARIANS

In Nigeria, all professions and registered associations have law and legal requirement that regulate their activities in the country. The Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria Act Chapter L 13, Decree No. 12 of 1995 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria is the law that regulates the professional activities of the librarians (law librarians inclusive) in Nigeria. Also the law that regulates the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) activities is also applicable to the law librarians. Due to their dual professional stands, the law librarians are both qualified to register as practising lawyers and librarians and they are naturally members of the two associations. The law that regulates Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) was established by Decree 12 of 1995. Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria is the body that regulates the practice of librarianship, just like other profession, like engineering and medicine in Nigeria. The Council also inducts librarians into the profession (Okojie, 2011).

The law that regulates the Nigerian Bar Association is in Law of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN), subsection 1(2) of the Legal Education Act, Cap L10, 2004. The law provides that there shall be a body to be known as the Council of Legal Education which shall be a corporate body with perpetual succession and a common seal to
regulate all activities of the legal professionals in Nigeria. Hence, legal requirement and the law that regulate law librarianship are the laws that regulate Librarianship Association and Nigerian Bar Association in Nigeria. Therefore, legal requirement and the law to regulate law librarianship as a profession are yet to be considered in the country. Tuyo (2015) posits that ‘legal requirement is still a recommendation of the Council of Legal Education (CLO) in Nigeria, no law yet’.

Council of Legal Education’s recommendation for being a law librarian requires that the aspirant should have a degree in Law and a degree in Librarianship. This tends to be very difficult to achieve, because law students and legal practitioners both young and old are not willing to work in the law libraries as law librarians. Even though law librarians are expected to teach legal research and the effective use of libraries, yet, law students still view law librarianship with indifference and would not like to choose the profession as career path (Onayeyan and Ajayi, 2015). They are basically interested in legal practice where they were originally trained.

Based on this, this study discovered that very few professional librarians also venture into studying law as additional qualification, which qualifies them as professional law librarians. Thus, a first degree in law and another degree in librarianship are adequate as these become the unwritten legal license for being a law librarian in Nigeria. Having master’s or doctoral degree in law is not necessary to be law librarian, but a first degree in law and master’s in librarianship combined is adequately required. Other law libraries, such as, judiciary libraries, also have lawyer/librarian but it is not a requirement unlike in academic law libraries, which made it a compulsory requirement to head the law libraries.

American Association of Law Librarians is of the opinion that, due to a substantial number of retiring law librarians, there is positive job outlook for the position of law librarians. Although, qualified law librarians are very few in Nigeria, there are many offices and positions where the qualified law librarians can work. For instance, law librarians can work as consultants to public and private law libraries. They can also work in law firms, public service libraries, bookstores and publishing houses (Tuyo, 2015). Law librarians can equally work in academic law libraries and judiciary libraries. For a law librarian to work as a self-employed person is not common in Nigeria, however, it is not impossible for law librarians to be self-employed. In which case, the law librarians can probably work after retirement as bookstore managers, publishers of legal materials, or law firm managers, where they can make gains that are more than their regular salaries when employed by others.
6 SALARIES

Even though salaries vary by experience and location in America, the average starting salary is between $45,000 and $100,000 (The Legal Information Professional, 2015). There is no disparity in the payment of law librarians’ salaries and other professional librarians in Nigeria. The salary for law librarians is as it applies to other librarians in in Nigeria organizational systems. It all depends on the entering point of the librarians. They get paid based on the salary scale of the respective institutions or according to entering levels or length of service in the offices where they are working. Those that are working in the government offices and other establishments in Nigeria, earn salary as applied to their colleagues in same grade in other disciplines and cadres. For instance, the salary for law librarians in academic law libraries ranges between N1,263,377 ($6,348.95) and N6,020,163 ($30,214.12).

7 ASSOCIATIONS

The law librarians are members of the Nigerian Library Association. In the interview conducted with the academic law librarians, it was gathered that “there is no association of Nigerian Law Librarians in Nigeria, unlike in the U.S and U.K where they have association of law librarians”. However, the Judiciary Libraries has an association for all the staff working in Court Libraries, known as Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL). This association members consists all the library staff members (Librarians and Library officers) that are working in the Judiciary Libraries. According to Malomo, and Sholaja (2001), the Nigerian Association of Law Libraries was established on the 7th March, 1975, as a section of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in Lagos. Nigerian Association of law libraries is also a member of the International Association of Law Libraries as institutional member; they are: Superior Courts, University Libraries, Research Institutions, Commercial Banks and Media Houses, while all practising librarians of the above mentioned institutions are individual members (Malomo, and Sholaja, 2001). The role of the Nigerian Association of Law Libraries is to advance the cause of its components and to achieve greater unity among its members to realize ideal and principle of cooperative activities among the law libraries in Nigeria. The Association also holds seminars, workshops, conferences and annual general meetings for law librarians in the
country. Therefore, there is no specific association purposely established for law librarianship in Nigeria.

However, Law librarians have no labour union, but they are natural members of the Nigerian Labour Union of their respective offices. For example, law librarians that are working in the University Libraries are members of Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities, while those in government employment are also members of the Nigerian Labour Union.

8 RESEARCH

The law librarians as members of the university academic staff are known to be research oriented and research focused for the development of their academic careers and the need to provide quality services to the library users. The law librarians also engaged in research activities just like their lecturers, they do research at their individual pace, attend seminars, workshops and equally participate in academic conferences both at home and abroad where they presents papers. Law librarians also publish papers or books in reputable journals that are related to their profession, purposely to contribute to knowledge, self-actualization and self-development. However, there is no specific national research for law librarians in Nigeria. This was supported by Tuyo (2015) who exclaimed that “Not to my Knowledge” in her reaction to the face–face interview conducted with her on the question of whether the Nigerian law librarians have a national research program.

9 JOURNAL

There are various international and local journals for law librarianship, where professional law librarians can publish articles, they presents papers that are published in conference proceedings. The local journal for law librarianship in Nigeria is: “Legal Information Collection Development in the 21st Century” edited by Nigerian Association of Law Libraries.

10 EVENTS OF LAW LIBRARIANS

The major activities performed by NALL (includes: annual conferences and workshops organized for law librarians and other librarians working in the law libraries) to showcase the outcome of the research carried out with their colleagues through
presentations of their research findings. The Nigerian Law School Library also organizes yearly event where they provide training workshop for law librarians in the Faculties of Law. These forays are normally used to train and re-train the entire universities law library staff on how to classify law materials with Moys Classification Scheme, access provision to legal sources, and the use of electronic sources and ICT resources in the law libraries. There is also the biennial conference/workshop organized for the Judiciary librarians, which is the forum where judiciary librarians share their work experiences and new knowledge. This conference is normally done every two years to promote the image of the judiciary librarians. In another interview with a law librarian, she said “the law librarians have no association but are member of the Nigerian Association of Law Libraries”. However, there are no monograph competitions, prizes and tribute for law librarians in Nigeria.

11 CHALLENGES

The paper found out that shortage of professional law librarians is the major challenge in law librarianship. There are very few law librarians to assist law library users that need legal research assistance. Therefore, only few law libraries are manned by professional law librarians in Nigeria. Currently, NUC/CLE would not accredit any academic law libraries that do not have qualified law librarians.

12 CONCLUSION

The conclusion that emerges from this study shows that law librarians’ dual education in law and librarianship as emphasized by the Council of Legal Education is creating barriers in effective performance of the current librarians working in the law libraries. The National Universities Commission and Council of Legal Education (NUC/CLE) is recommendations and document only recognized lawyer/librarian as the only law librarian who is qualified to head the law libraries. This is because; the librarians without the law background tend to see NUC/CLE’s recommendation as an attempt to relegate them as incompetent law librarian that cannot head the law libraries. There is no single policy set aside for introduction of association, laws, regulations and legal requirements for the law librarians in Nigeria. The findings of the study also reveal that, law students have no interest in pursuing law librarianship as a career path, but hold positive attitudes towards legal practice.
13 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, therefore recommends that, the librarians working in the law libraries need to be encouraged through on-the-job training and re-training programs, to be sponsored to study law degree to qualify as law librarians. That law students should also be emboldened to hold positive attitudes towards law librarianship and to see law librarianship as a profession and another career path to success, where they can later practice in future. The paper further recommends that law librarianship should be given a serious and acceptable attention to encouraged the establishment of their own association, law and legal requirement/regulations, as well as, national research centers for competence and proper operation of the law libraries.

14 REFERENCES


