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CAREER POSITION FOR UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The paper summarizes the reaction of respondents on career position for university librarians in Nigeria. It itemizes the problems and prospects inherent in the career and non-career position for the university librarian. Merits and demerits of succession as against external recruitment are highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The library profession in Nigeria has undergone a chequered trail in its march to greatness. First was the slow pace of development, hampered by the attendant teething problems, followed by uncertainty as to whether university-based librarians were academic or administrative staff and whether they should run academic salary structure and fringe benefits. The latter problem was barely settled by an agreement between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (A.S.U.U.) and the Federal Government, in which university-based librarians benefited than another topical issue arose:-

"According to the National Universities Commission (N.U.C), the tenure of a university librarian is only for five years subject to a renewal of not more than one term of five years" ¹

The decree if enacted would have meant non-career position for university librarians. However, the decree was repealed later in 1993. In 1996, the Nigeria Federal Government once again felt dissatisfied with career system and in a bid to sanitize the educational system, Decreed as follows:

"... Similarly Decree no.55 of 1993 has been amended to provide a fixed renewable term for certain principal officers such as Registrars, Bursars and Librarians". ²

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to investigate whether majority of Nigerian Librarians advocate career position for the university librarians. It also aims at investigating whether librarians desire elective succession to the post of the university librarian.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is abundance of literature on librarianship as a career in developed countries like the United States of America (U.S.A), United Kingdom (U.K.)³ and France.⁴ In developing countries, one has come across a few, among which the one by Nzotta⁵ seems to have treated the topic to some details. It was Guttsman⁶ who broached the subject when he suggested a semblance between the government of academic departments and government of libraries in Britain with respect to rotational headship. Similarly, Bankole submitted that the position and tenure of the university librarian should be specified as for other academic staff.⁷ It was also mentioned that the tendency had been for heads or directors of institutions including the university librarians to be recruited from outside rather than by internal succession.⁸

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. It had three sections. Section A was on the background of respondents. Section B dealt with appointment of university librarians while Section C was on career position for the university librarian. The questionnaire was tested on twelve professional colleagues in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The corrected questionnaire were mailed to academic librarians and university librarians in the first, second and third generations Federal Universities, numbering twenty-one (21) academic libraries. The choice of these universities was based on the fact that their librarians should have had considerable experience on the career position for academic librarians.

In all, 220 questionnaires were dispatched and 195 responses (88.6%) were received by the end of 1995. Out of these, 180 (81.85%) of the whole sample were usable. The rest 15 were rejected because in each of them some vital questions were left unanswered. The data collected were coded and analysed.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptive method of data analysis was used while person's product moment correlation and chi-square analysis were used to verify any relationship between variables. The variables investigated include (a) years of experience and designation and (b) Academic library status and career perception.

Table 1
Number of respondents and Category of Librarians
within each set of years of experience. N = 180

Years of experience	Number of respondents	Designation	Category of Librarians within each set of years of experience
1 - 5	40	Asst. Librarian	40
6 - 10	20	Librarian II	24
11 -15	56	Librarian I	20
16 - 20	40	Senior Librarian	20
20 and above	24	Principal Librarian and above	76
Total	180		180

$$r = 0.7219 \quad (df = 178) \quad P < .01$$

Table I above shows that some respondents who had spent 11 - 15 years, and 16 to 20 years have become "principal Librarians and above" while four respondents who had spent 11-15 years are still librarian II.

Verification of relationship between number of respondents and category of librarians within each set of years of experience gives a correlation coefficient, $r = 0.7219$, indicating a linear relationships. It shows that current designation in librarianship does depend on long years of experience.

Qualification

All the 180 respondents registered 192 qualifications. That was because some respondents had two degrees. There were 16(8.33%) holders of ordinary diploma in librarianship. Although this is not academic library qualification, it is numbered to account for the 192 recorded library qualifications. There were 8(4.17%) holders of American Library Association (A.L.A.) Certificate, 36(18.78%) first degree in Library Science, 20(10.42%) Postgraduate Diploma in Library Science and 108(56.25%) Master's degree in Librarianship. Preponderance of master's degree is not unconnected with the fact that it has become the basic academic library qualification. Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D degree, 4(2.08%) recorded the least.

The University Librarian

The number of the University Librarians (Library Chief Executives) that each of the Nigerian Federal Universities has had since its inception was also investigated. The first generation universities recorded 3-4, while second and third generations universities recorded 1-2 university librarians.

In the first generation universities one University Librarian (Library Chief Executive) occupied the position for 30 years, another University Librarian occupied the post for 20 years, while in two other universities the position was occupied for 15 and 13 years respectively. Second and third generation university libraries were not spared of this syndrome.⁹

Appointment of the University Librarian

On the appointment of University Librarians 56 (31.11%) indicated that it was from within the university library staff, external advertisement notwithstanding. 40 (22.22%) showed that it was from outside through external advertisement, while 76 (42.22%) signified that it was sometimes from within and sometimes from external. 8 (4.45%) maintained that it was only through external advertisement.

On the respondents' reaction to the method of appointment of university librarians, 36 (20%) respondents wished university librarians to be appointed from outside while 136 (75.55%) did not approve of external appointment if the resident staff were eligible candidates. 8 (4.44%) maintained that appointment at that level in the university had been by advertisement and had nothing to do with the ability of resident staff. It could be inferred that majority (75.56%) favoured elective succession to the post of the university librarian. Among the reasons advanced by advocates of external appointment were introduction of fresh and modern ideas from other libraries and forestalling of ill-will among eligible peers within the library system. It would also prevent in-breeding and perpetuation of unpopular and/or retrogressive policies. A few maintained that the post should be for the best performers and should not be a function of eligibility within the library system.

75.56% who favoured elective succession opined that it would spur other librarians to work harder with the hope of being a university librarian with time. It would erode stagnation of industrious librarians and create a more harmonious atmosphere conducive for academic work. Continuity in favourable administrative policies and programmes would be ensured.

Career Position

Of the 76 "principal librarians and above" who responded, 40 (52.63%) supported career position and 36 (47.37%) opposed it.

Of the 104 "other academic librarians" who responded, 24 (23.07%) supported career position, while 80 (76.93%) opposed it. A chi-square analysis in Table 2 shows that academic library status or rank is related to career position. Succinctly, it shows that academic library status or rank has effect on the perception of librarians with regard to career position of the university librarian.

Table 2
Academic Library Status and Career Perception N = 180

Academic Library Status	Advocates of Career Position	Opponents of Career Position	Total
Principal Librarians and above	40 (52.63%)	36 (47.37%)	76
Other academic Librarians	24 (23.07%)	80 (76.93%)	104
Total	64 (35.56%) X ² = 45.39	116 (64.44%) (df=1)	180 (100%) P<.01

64 respondents who advocated career structure returned ninety two(92) responses while one hundred and sixteen (116) opposing respondents returned two hundred and eight (208) responses.

Analysis of the Responses:

i. Advocates of Career Structure

Thirty-six (39.14%) believed in maintaining the status quo. Twenty-four (26.08%) opined that the erstwhile university librarian would no longer fit into the university library system. Sixteen (17.39%) had the impression that it was yet an inept time for rotating the position of a university librarian while another sixteen (17.39%) feared unforeseen personality conflict between the erstwhile and the incumbent university librarian. A few responses cautioned against politicizing the post. They reasoned that it would not augur well for the academic status of the profession.

ii. Opponents of the career structure

Eighty (38.46%) respondents believed that more librarians would be opportuned to become university librarians before retirement. 60 (28.85%) affirmed that publishing for promotion would be more meaningful since published librarians would hope to reach the pinnacle of the profession unhindered.

40 (19.23%) were convinced that it would boost the image of the profession while 28 (13.46%) hoped that it would make more people join the profession.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the current designation in librarianship does depend on long years of experience. The highest number of the university librarians any Federal University library (including 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation universities) has had, since its inception up to 1995, is not more than four (4). There are very few academic librarians with tertiary degrees (Ph.D.) Nigerian academic librarians favour elective succession to the post of the university librarian. Academic library status or rank has effect on the perception of librarians with regard to career position of the university librarian. Nigerian academic librarians favour rotational library headship.

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