



Assessing The Librarians Visibilty And Role: A Public Survey In Nasarawa State

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ABSTRACT:- This study assessed the librarians visibility and role as perceived by members of the public in Nasarawa state. Descriptive survey method was used for the study. Data were collected through the use of structured closed ended questionnaire. Out of 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed to members of the public in three towns in Nasarawa state, 274 copies of the questionnaire representing 91% were retrieved and analysed for this study. Descriptive statistics expressed in frequency counts, percentages and mean scores were used to analysed the data. The findings indicated that librarians were least visible compared to other professions in Nasarawa state. However, the respondents affirmed that librarians played critical roles in educational and literacy development of the state. The findings also shows sufficient emperical evidence to conclude that librarians roles were recognised in cultural preservation and value re – orientation and religious growth and development of the society. Lobbying for appointments by librarians, role and visibility advocacy and positive image creation for librarians were recommended.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are multiple definations available for the term librarian which no doubt explains the multifarious role of the Librarians. Mensah (2013) stated that Librarians play unique role in gathering, organising and coordinating access to the best available information sources for the benefit of the user who turns it into usable knowledge. Librarianship is no doubt a profession. It has the key attributes of a profession such as having a body of knowledge, presence of underlying theory and code of ethics, common objectives, professionalism among others. Librarianship has come along way in Nigeria. The Nigerian Library Association, the professional body for practicing Librarians in Nigeria was founded in 1962. The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria the corporate body charge with the responsibility of regulating the practice of the library and information science profession in Nigeria was established by Act No.12 of 1995.

A librarian is a trained information specialist who works professionally in a library and and may hold a degree in Library Science or Library and information Science. Free online dictionary defined Librarian as a person who is responsible for collection of specialized or technical information or materials such as musical scores or computer documentation. Mohammed (1998) noted that Librarians are generally perceived as professionals responsible for serving readers with corresponding books and other graphic records rather than information experts preoccupied with the provision of varied relevant information to clients irrespective of the formats. We are aware of sundry defination of Librarianship as a profession but the thorny issue of discouse is how Librarians are been viewed as nonetities by the public in a typical Nigerian setting particularly in Nasarawa state where the population of practicing Librarians are few.

Librarianship is a profession that may be attained through degree programme in the university. Upon graduation and employed in library and information centre, one is designated a professional Librarian and accorded faculty status if such an individual work in academic libraries. The criteria for progession in Librarianship varies from institution to instution. Sadly, even among the academia, the Librarians's role is not well appreciated and recognised. This presupposes that Librarians are being threatened by conflict of recognition from all facets of Nigerian society. The role of Librarians in the learning process has been documented. Nnaji (1986) remarked that through out the centuries Librarians have preserved books and records from hazards of war, fire and flood and it is not idle boast to say that they have played a large part maitaining the cultural heritage of their countries. Irwin (1949) stated that Librarianship is above all individual service concerned with value and the pontential of the human mind. Melvin Dewey as cited by Mensah (2013) revealed that the time has come when many librarians may without assumption speak of their occupation as profession. He further noted

that libraries have commanded great respect and much has been written of their priceless worth but the opinion of the public has been largely prevalent that a librarian is merely a book keeper whose duty is to prevent the book from loss and to a reasonable extent from the worms.

It is a statement of fact that there are ongoing arguments about the relevance of librarians in the contemporary Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven society. The simple fact remains that there are many knowledge managers that cut across allied professionals such as system analysts, records managers and data administrators among others.

In recent times, there have been arguments about the relevance of a librarian in a digital age. The respect and recognition accorded a profession by society are largely determined by public understanding and acceptance of the vital role of the profession in that society (Okoye, 2014). Thus, the respect accorded Librarians in Nigeria is a function of the nature of the tasks and responsibilities performed which have multiplier effect on the growth and development of the society at large.

Professional identity has remained an age long struggle among various professional bodies in Nigeria in particular and the world at large. Librarians are seemingly caught up in the war of value identity. The role and identity of librarians in Nigeria have been perceived variously by non-librarians. This has impacted greatly on librarianship identity as a whole. To non-librarians, librarians are viewed and referred to as book guards, book keepers, book counters and book dusters among others. It is obvious that the role and identity of a librarian has been shaped by several factors. This changing role has equally generated a contested value war on the contributions of librarians to societal development and growth. Gray (2012) stated that librarianship identity has undergone dramatic changes and ranging from Edwards and Dewey's originating librarians' as book keeper/cataloguers, library economist, or through to Otlet and Shera's documentalist, Ranganathan's librarian helper and present day identity, such as community knowledge creation facilitators.

Undoubtedly, librarianship in Nigeria is relatively new and is less than a century old (Aina and Serema, 2001). Historically, it is young compared to other professions like Veterinary Surgeons (1940), Surveying (1934) and Medicine (1882). It is true that librarianship has evolved from colonial experience which began with the training of library and information professionals with the arrival of late Prof John Harris as the librarian of the then newly established University College Ibadan. (Nnadozie, 2013). John Harris is believed to be the first to practice librarianship at the professional level in Nigeria. Thus, at present, there are scores of librarians in Nigeria working in various libraries and information centres. Some of them have attained the status of Chartered Librarians of Nigeria (CLN) and Fellows Nigerian Library Association (FNLA). Despite attaining these remarkable feats, they are often than not heard in state affairs. There seems to be no commensurate recognition of their roles and identity by members of the public. The foregoing scenario is responsible to why librarians remained the unsung heroes in Nigeria at large and Nasarawa state in particular.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

If there is a profession one hears less about, known and recognised in terms of the value it adds to individual, group and societal growth and development. One may be right to conclude that it is the Librarian. Available published reports have repeatedly drawn attention to the poor recognition accorded librarians in the scheme of state affairs in Nigeria. Chimizie (2014) remarked that it is not surprising that Aki and Pawpaw are recipients of national honours while librarians' contributions to the country are hardly ever remembered. He further revealed that librarians will continue to be excluded in the scheme of affairs like the recent National Conference if we fail to let people know we exist. The fact remains that many unsavoury remarks have been made about the Librarian's status and role by the public. These remarks are made out of sheer ignorance and disdain for the role played by Librarians in the digital age. The remarks made about Librarians by members of the public include book dusters, book guards, book keepers and book arrangers.

There is growing concern on the lack of recognition for librarians' identity and role in the scheme of state affairs. This crisis of recognition is prevalent even in academic community. Today, Librarians risk the danger of being marginalised. They are not well and popularly heard on topical national and state affairs like their contemporaries from medicine, law, finance and politics, journalism among others. To add salt to injury, Librarians are considered less relevant or worse still made redundant in state matters. The task for maintaining professional relevance is not abstract consideration of Librarians' role but how people acknowledge and cherish what Librarians are doing. Thus, there is a growing sensitivity about lack of recognition for some professions in Nasarawa state which Librarians are affected.

The implication of the foregoing is that Librarians are facing the enormous threat of being marginalized or worse still made less popular and irrelevant in the state of affairs in Nasarawa state. Considering the growing conflict of recognition on the Librarians' identity and role. The fate and prestige of Librarians is erroneously undermined by some annoying questions such as who is a Librarian? How much is his/her contribution? And who does he/she know? This and many other scenarios informed the need to assess librarians' visibility and role as perceived by members of the public in Nasarawa state.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To ascertain how librarians are visible to members of the public compared to other professions in Nasarawa State.
2. To find out the perceived roles librarians played in societal development in Nasarawa State.
3. To find out the extent to which Librarians roles are recognised and respected by members of the public in Nasarawa state.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many studies conducted on the conflict of recognition and role of Librarians in Nigeria Okiy (2014) stated that librarianship profession has been seen by many members of the Nigerian populace as an all comers affairs. She further revealed that the role of librarians in the society is greatly misunderstood and hence viewed with levity. Aboyade (1982) pointed out that even among the highly educated Nigerians, there is still lack of appreciation of library and information professionals and the library services. Uzuegbu and Onyekwendiri as cited by Itseko (2011) remarked that it seems people in Nigeria do not not know about Nigerian Library Association. This by implication Librarians seems to be less popular. They further showed that mention is usually made of professional Association such as Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN), Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) and Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ) without easily mention of Nigerian Library Association (NLA). Agada (1997) also affirmed that Nigerian Librarians have been faced with the challenges of recognition and public support. Gray (2003) asserted that there are mixed opinions regarding the term Librarian. A study conducted by the Chatered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2010 found that the term had negative or misleading associations amongst the public. Bukkof (2005) noted that a Librarian needs a battery of useful personality and character traits, a strong sense of individuality and the ability to see humour. Chu (2015) noted that the Librarian should be viewed as a filter between the reader and the torrents of books. He further remarked that librarians are expected to fit with environment, technology, workings with people through political knowledge and skills. Mohammed as cited by Ifidon (2008) holds the view that librarianship as a profession must provide for :

- Acquisition of the required knowledge, skills and techniques for practice;
- Attainment and recognition of the practitioners at the various levels of the professional strata;
- The existence of indigenou professional staff;
- Harmonised and co-ordinated programmes and curricular that will ensure uniformity and avoid doubts about the competence of the products of some institutions;
- Monitoring trainees projects to avoid duplication; and
- The application of new technology.

Lawal (2003) remarked that librarians should provide services for the good of the society in general and the society must recognise the activities of librarians, accord it respect and carve out a professional image for it. Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri (2011) stated that professional visibility expresses recognition and the general state at which a profession is perceived. They further affirmed that people in Nigeria seems not to know about librarianship as one can hear regularly people make mention of professions like medical Doctors, Engineers, Teachers and Journalists etc. Bello (1996) pointed out that the choice of Librarianship is professionally influenced by factors such as stability, secure future, social status, prestige of the profession, satisfactory earnings and the acquisition of knowledge.

Aina (2007) stated that a profession will be respected in a society if there is assurance that the trainees in the profession impact positively on the society's growth and development.

Commenting on the role of librarians, Crosby (2008) noted that librarians roles and duties include outreach services, reference or research duties, collection development roles, instructing, technical services, archiving services and providing and managing access to electronic resources.

V. METHODOLOGY

The research method adopted for this study was descriptive survey. This is based on the views and opinions of the respondents. This was adopted because it gives the respondents the opportunity to freely express their decisions on issues without gauging their disposition. The population of the study consists of 274 members of the public sampled in three major towns namely Lafia, Akwanga and Keffi using simple random sampling technique. The choice of these towns was informed by the fact that many institutions of learning at all levels exist in such towns and some librarians lived there. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument has two sections : the first section requests for the gender of the respondents. The second section contains items on type of existing professions in Nasarawa state, role of librarians and the extent to which

librarians role are recognised by members of the public. Frequency counts, percentages and mean scores were used to analysed data collected for the study.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Response Rate. Of the 300 copies of questionnaire administered, 274 (91%) were retrieved for the study.

Table 1 : Gender Profile of the Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	184	67
Female	90	33
Total	274	100

The 274 respondents in the study comprised of 184 (67%) male and 90 (33%) female.

Table 2 : Respondents Rating on Professional Visibility in Nasarawa State.

Name of profession	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Medical Doctors	41	15
Pharmacists	6	2
Laboratory Scientist/Technologists	10	4
Nurses	15	5
Teachers	40	15
Journalists	5	2
Surveyors	6	2
Engineers	14	5
Lawyers	27	10
Architecs	4	1
Librarians	4	1
Accountants	24	9
Auditors	8	3
Farmers	30	11
Politicians	40	15

The respondents were asked to indicate the type of professions that exist in Nasarawa State. This is to determine the visibility of librarians compared to other professions. Responses in Table 2 showed Medical Doctors as the most visible profession with frequency score of 41 (15%). This is followed by 40 (15%) respondents who indicated the existence of Teachers and Politicians respectively. On the other hand, the respondents indicated that Librarians and Architects were the least visible professions in Nasarawa State. This findings agrees with Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri (2011) findings who noted that the visibility of Librarians in Abia state is very poor. It can be inferred from the above that librarians are not well known in Nasarawa state. This may be as a result of minimal contact Librarians have with members of the public. In addition, it may be attributed to their handful population in Nasarawa state compared with the population of other professions like Teachers, Lawyers and Medical Doctors etc

Table 3 : Respondents Rating on the Role of Librarians

Type of Role	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Known as agents for educational development	74	27
Known as agents for economic development	16	6
Known as agents for religious development and tolerance	8	3
Known as agents for cultural preservation value orientation and re- birth	24	9
Known as agents for socio- political enlightenment	8	3
Known as information managers	83	30
Known as information literacy developers	61	22

The respondents were asked to indicate the various roles played by librarians. Several roles were highlighted for them to indicate based on their on perception . Based on the responses in Table 3. 83 (30%) of the respondents were in affirmation that librarians played dominant role in information management . This is

followed by 74 (27%) and 61(22%) of the respondents who affirmed that librarians played key roles in educational and information literacy development respectively. On the other hand, 8(3%) of the respondents agreed that librarians played their roles in religious and socio - political development respectively.

Table 4 : Extent to Which Librarians Role are Recognised.

Role	VAR	AR	FR	NR	Mean	Decision
Educational development	108(39%)	92(34%)	46(17%)	28(10%)	3.02	Accepted
Economic Development	47(17%)	58(21%)	118(43%)	51(19%)	2.36	Rejected
Religious growth and development	64(23%)	93(34%)	83(30%)	34(12%)	2.64	Accepted
Cultural preservation and value reorientation	89(32%)	61(22%)	89(32%)	35(13%)	2.74	Accepted
Socio- political development	75(27%)	79(29%)	68(25%)	52(19%)	2.68	Accepted
Information Management	136(50%)	50(18%)	54(20%)	34(12%)	3.05	Accepted
Information literacy development	104(38%)	84(31%)	30(11%)	56(20%)	2.86	Accepted

The result in Table 4, using a criterion mean of 2.5 as the limit for acceptance of the extent to which librarians role are recognised shows that librarians roles were recognised in information management with a mean score of 3.05. This is followed by librarians role in educational development and information literacy development with mean scores of 3.02 and 2.86 respectively. Conversely, librarians role was not recognised in economic development of the society. This is no doubt an indication of lack recognition for the role of economic information service provision in Nasarawa state. The provision of business information has facilitated trade and business operations as well as economic growth of various societies across the world (Rugman, 2001). Thus, the public need to be educated on the role librarians to the economic development of the society.

VII. CONCLUSION

A modest attempt to compare the visibility of librarians with other professions in Nasarawa state has been established. This study has been able to provide empirical evidence on the poor visibility of librarians in Nasarawa state. This behoves on librarians to take frontal role by embarking on roles and identity advocacy in print and electronic media for the purpose of carving a niche for themselves in the scheme of state affairs. They should ensure they lobby for appointive and elective positions at various tiers of government and in the private sector. Librarians role should be extended beyond library walls and academic community. It time librarians impact positively by embarking on activities that impact positively on social, economic, religious, political and educational growth and development of Nigeria at large and Nasarawa state in particular.

Recommendations

1. Librarians should galvanise support from the media and allied professions. They should seriously lobby arms of government at the various tiers of government and pressure groups to seek appointments into the governing boards of agencies and parastatals. They should market their activities and programmes and embark on impact driven programmes that could enhance the growth and development of the society in all facets of human endeavours.
2. Government should acknowledge the roles played librarians by conferring national honours award and national awards for productivity as mark of recognitions for librarians contribution on societal growth and development. Library committees should be constituted at state houses of assemblies and national assembly standing committees.
3. Librarians should create a positive image on their visibility and roles. They should reverse the negative attitude held towards librarianship where librarians are seen as all comers profession.
4. As a matter of urgency, librarians should build strong relationship and synergies with members of the public in the provision community development services.

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