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Professionalism in library and information science

An examination of current trends, needs, and opportunities in academic libraries in Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the current trends, needs and opportunities of professionalism in librarianship in Nigeria. The broad purpose of the paper was to investigate the level of professionalism in librarianship and to ascertain the current status, trends and opportunities within the profession among academic librarians in Nigeria. Five specific research questions were formulated which are: to examine how librarians value librarianship as a profession, to elicit the efforts made by librarians with regards to professional development, to ascertain methods of acquiring current competencies within the profession, to investigate the role of professional bodies in promoting professionalism and excellence within the library and information science (LIS) profession and to proffer strategies to enhance professionalism and excellence among librarians in Nigeria.

Design/methodology/approach – Descriptive survey design was adopted in the study across both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The area of the study was the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State. Population of the study comprised a total of 63 librarians in the two universities. All librarians were sampled because of the small sample size. The instrument for data collection was oral interview and questionnaire which contained 53 items derived from the research questions and built on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree, (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The criterion mean was 2.50. Therefore, any calculated mean below 2.50 was adjudged a negative score, while any mean from 2.50 and above was regarded as a positive score.

Findings – The study revealed the challenges facing professionalism and excellence within the LIS field as lack of funding for professional development, lack of sponsorship to workshops and conferences, lack of uninterruptible internet facility and a dearth of professional mentors in the South East zone. Other problems gathered from a scheduled interview with some senior professionals in the institutions revealed that most librarians are still facing the challenge of imbibing and utilizing emerging skills in the LIS professions such as digital archiving and data mining skills for their day-to-day activities.

Originality/value – Recommendations arising from the study were proffered such as the creation of staff development programmes by management; collaboration and partnership by libraries within the zone; acquisition of training through workshops and conferences irrespective of sponsorship by the institutions; and teaming of academic librarians to enhance their visibility and publication output. International staff exchanges and opportunities for sabbatical leave, which hitherto was not common in the South East Zone, were recommended. Among other recommendations also were building of consortia with libraries in the country; LIS professional bodies helping to create visibility and prestige of the LIS profession; and, finally, to scale up the image of the profession the marketing of library products through profiling of patrons and furnishing them with required information has not only become necessary but critical.

Keywords Librarianship, Opportunities, Professionalism, Library practice, Library trends

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The twenty-first century has brought a lot of dynamism to the library and information science (LIS) profession. This has come as a result of the sophisticated nature of the present day library user. Our library patrons are constantly prompting librarians to be more proactive in their service delivery. The advent of the Internet has compelled librarians to work at providing services in more dynamic ways. Library and information service is an umbrella term covering all services obtainable in the library. This does not only imply "within-the-library services" but also includes mobile library service which, in essence, is the provision of library services to clients outside the library building. There is, therefore, the need for professionalism in providing these library services. Professionalism, in a general sense, is a term that simply entails the art of playing expertise in one's field – trying to meet the standards demanded by the profession. Professionalism in library and information services is regarded as a "hidden treasure". In the words of Brooker (2010, p. 1), "Professional development in the library and information profession in Australia is our profession's gold that remains a hidden treasure".

In the LIS field, professionalism has to do with the whole gamut of the operations within a library workforce, essentially, the relationship of the librarians with library management, their clients, colleagues, team spirit, staff development, the role of the Nigerian Library Associations, and more. Librarianship is the application of these work ethics to the realization of the goals of the profession. Entsua-Mensah (2004) succinctly encapsulated this idea when he opined that some of the basic attributes of a profession are that it should have a body of knowledge which allows people to assess the accomplishments and standards of the formal content of the educational systems of the profession. In addition, he affirmed that there should be the presence of an underlying theory and code of ethics that guides the activities of the practitioners, as well as a common association that takes care of its members. Professionalism of the LIS profession in Nigeria is a novel area which not many scholars have delved into yet. A few scholars in Africa, such as Entsua-Mensah (2004) and Lawal (2000), have done some theoretical works in this area. However, no empirical studies known to the authors have been done in the Southeast part of Nigeria. This has created an obvious gap which this study is set to fill.

Research questions

This study examines professionalism in the LIS profession and ascertains the current status, trends, and opportunities within the profession among academic librarians in Southeast Nigeria. The following research questions guided the study:

- *RQ1*. How do librarians value librarianship as a profession?

- *RQ2*. What are the various efforts made by librarians with regard to professional development?

- *RQ3*. What are the methods of acquiring current competencies within the profession?

- *RQ4*. What roles do professional bodies play in promoting professionalism among librarians?

RQ5. What are the challenges faced by librarians with regard to professionalism and excellence within the LIS profession?

RQ6. What are the possible strategies for enhancing professionalism and excellence among librarians in Southeast Nigeria?

It is germane at this point to make some conceptual clarifications to put issues in a proper perspective as shown below.

Conceptual clarifications
Librarianship as a profession and its value
Writing on the legal qualifications of librarians, Takeuchi and Kim (1999) remarked that the goal of LIS education is to produce qualified librarians. There is a universally accepted definition of librarians – a corps of professionals that are trained to carry out core duties of a library, beyond the day-to-day routines of library officers and library attendants. These duties include cataloguing, indexing, collection development, serials management and reader services. Wikipedia (2010) records that:

> A librarian may provide other information services, including computer provision and training, coordination of public programs, basic literacy education, assistive equipment for people with disabilities, and help with finding and using community resources.

Librarians in Nigeria: who are they?
Narrowing down to Africa, and Nigeria in particular, librarianship as a profession has indeed come a long way. This is evidenced by the establishment of library schools in various renowned universities in Nigeria. Based on Lancour (1958) and Saleh (2011), works on library needs in West Africa and Northern Nigeria, respectively, two library schools were established in Nigeria. The first was the Institute of Librarianship which was opened in 1960 at the University College in Ibadan and the second was at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in 1968. These institutions were built on different philosophical and professional orientations. The Ibadan library school began with a one-year basic professional program leading to the award of the post-graduate diploma in accordance with the main objective of the Institute which has been to educate the leadership for the library profession. The Zaria library school mounted an undergraduate program leading to the award of the Bachelor of Library Science degree based on the objective to train professional librarians at all levels with well-rounded education up to international standards while placing emphasis on the problems facing libraries in Africa. Today, several LIS programmes have been mounted at both the undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

In Nigeria today, librarianship has grown to be a widely recognized profession. As noted by Saleh (2011), the stage for the development of the library profession in Nigeria was set up with the arrival of John Harris as the librarian of the University College Ibadan in 1948, who was active in developing the University College Library and also organized the Native Authority Libraries in 1950 which was the first organized Library Training course in 1950. According to Reader (1966), quoted by Lawal, 2000), most occupations need professional associations to focus opinion, work up a body of knowledge and insist upon a decent standard of conduct. In this regard, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) started off as a body to bring library science practitioners and professionals together to share a common goal. The objectives of the association are:

- to unite persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services;
- to safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians;
- to promote the establishment and development of libraries and information centers;
- to watch legislation affecting libraries and assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries within Nigeria;
- to promote and encourage bibliographical study, research and library cooperation; and
- to do all lawful things as are incidental and conducive to the attainment of the above objectives (www.nla-ng.org/aboutus.html).

Although the above objectives hinge on professionalism and the library profession, there is more to professionalism in librarianship than stipulated above. For instance, a professional librarian in Nigeria is delegated a person that has obtained a bachelor's or master's degree in LIS. This singular reason prompted the body called LRCN (Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria) to start up the process of registering practicing librarians and verify that these librarians must have passed through training in a university. These are differentiated from paraprofessionals who could be diploma holders in the same profession.

The LRCN has the following as requisites for becoming a registered librarian:

- *Obtain academic qualification*: The journey toward becoming a chartered librarian starts with the attainment of required academic qualification(s) in the LIS discipline. The minimum qualification required to be a chartered librarian in Nigeria is first a postgraduate degree or its equivalent in librarianship as determined by the LRCN.
- *Pay the required registration fee*: The sum of 3,000 (N3,000) for the LRCN registration form should be paid into any of LRCN bank accounts.
- *Obtain a LRCN registration form*: After making the required registration fee payment into the LRCN account, the registration form can either be downloaded from the NLA Web site (www.nla-ng.org) or obtained by going to any of the LRCN Collection Centers in Nigeria with evidence of payment (original bank teller).
- *Complete and submit a registration form*: The registration form should be properly completed and submitted at any LRCN Collection Center, or at the LRCN Head Office.
- *Consideration of application and verification of credentials*: LRCN will consider applications received, verify the documentation submitted by applicants and ascertain their eligibility for registration as librarians in Nigeria.
- *Notification of qualified applicants*: Applicants who have been adjudged qualified for registration as librarians and chartered have their names advertised in the media (National Dailies or the Online Forum or any other medium accepted by the Council).
- *Induction of registered librarians*: An induction ceremony is organized for registered librarians, where certificates are issued. Successfully registered

librarians are expected to pay some certain amount of money which is determined by the council for the induction.

Professional values and ethics in LIS

In the LIS profession, there seems to be no worldwide standard written ethics and values that guide the profession. However, Ranganathan's five laws of librarianship have always served as a watchword for librarians and state:

(1) books are for use;

(2) every book its reader;

(3) every reader its book;

(4) save the time of the reader; and

(5) the library is a growing organism

Library services revolve around the above stated laws, with the librarian matching readers' requests with relevant materials and in a timely manner. Nevertheless, there is still a need for values and ethics which should guide the library profession. What are these values in a general sense? Values may be defined as "generalized abstract ideas held by human individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad" (Allan, 1993, p. 769). In this century, the core values of North American librarianship have included intellectual freedom, open and free access to information and resistance to censorship. Academic librarians have demonstrated these values by supporting research and the advancement of knowledge. Although not always without controversy, these values seem clearly defined and easy to support.

Recently, the LRCN built a Web site to enable professional librarians in Nigeria to be updated on the affairs of the council. The vision of the council as stated on the official website (www.lrcn.gov.ng) is: *To be a world-class regulatory body that provides a platform for the delivery of quality library and information service in Nigeria.* Their mission is: *To pursue the attainment of professional excellence by determining who are librarians; set standards of knowledge and skills required for registration and practice; guidelines for accreditation and minimum standards for libraries, and maintenance of professional discipline among librarians.*

The LRCN as a body has developed the mandate of:

• determining who is a librarian;

• determining the level of knowledge and skill required to be a librarian;

• registering all qualified librarians;

• setting and maintaining standards for all categories of libraries;

• maintaining discipline within the LIS profession; and

• accrediting library school programmes.

More recently, the LRCN released a draft code of ethics and professional conduct for librarians in Nigeria which, according to the information on the official Web site, is its bid to promote standard practices and further regulate the LIS profession in Nigeria. The draft code of conduct is declared open to amendment by professionals. It is a 13-page document which is sectionalized into various parts that address the immediate concerns of librarians. The draft code of conduct can be downloaded at http://

tinyurl.com/cm5nbff. This code of ethics in draft would serve as an answer to the
curiosity and anticipation of Opara (2010) who stated that:

> Unfortunately, there is not yet a code of ethics for LIS practitioners in Nigeria. However,
> sections 16 and 17 of the Librarians (Registration, etc.) Council of Nigeria Act of 1995
> (Librarians, 1995) provide for the establishment of a Librarian's Disciplinary Committee and
> punishment for unprofessional conduct respectively. In order words, these sections of the law
> recognizing LIS as a profession in Nigeria anticipate a code of ethics for LIS practitioners in
> Nigeria (p. 159).

No code of ethics of any profession is identical, although they may share some of the
same principles or standards. The American Library Association (ALA) code of ethics
was adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council and then amended:
June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008. The code appears in eight broad
statements on ALA's site (www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics).

Librarians and professional development

Most professionals in different fields seem to be eager to develop themselves in their
area of expertise. There are many professional associations in Nigeria that regulate
different professions. Some of these associations administer certificate examinations
that qualify membership to it, while others do not. Professional associations set ethical
standards and standards of professional conduct for members, which include
benchmarks and best practices (Harvey, 2004). This might be due to competitions or just
for the sake of updating their knowledge as the society engages in knowledge sharing.
In the process of this development, knowledge is acquired, utilized and usually shared
among colleagues, thereby increasing the value of knowledge. Pan and Hovde (2010),
supporting this view, stated that professional development is a lifetime learning
process, which is both universal and individualized. It is a universal requirement of all
librarians to keep up with the rapid changes in the library field and maintain
professionalism. At the same time, it is an individualized experience that varies with the
needs of specific work duties, as well as resources available around one's working, social
and academic environment.

For librarians to develop themselves in their profession, there is therefore a need for
continuous training, scholarship and mastery of their discipline. In the library schools,
certain skills are taught to the students in preparation for becoming practicing
professionals. Such students rise to become librarians, teachers and administrators,
thereby, having installed such individuals in positions that would enable them to
practice what they have learnt and impart such ideals onto others. Tomaszewski and
MacDonald (2009) observed that librarians attend library conferences for professional
development and continuing education, to learn about new trends, new technologies and
to build a professional network. Vega and Connell (2009) explored why professional
librarians attend conferences and considered their attitudes toward various conference
offerings and whether conference attendance was important to their careers. The study
found that the main reason the respondents attended conferences was to achieve
professional rejuvenation and networking. More recently, Eke (2011) undertook an
empirical study on the impact of NLA conference attendance on librarians' professional
development and stated that the major reason, among others proffered, that librarians
attend conferences was to learn about professional issues.

Librarianship in Africa

The library profession is waxing strong not only in Nigeria but also in Africa as a whole. Across the globe, librarianship preaches "freedom to information" by users judging from Ranganathan's five laws of librarianship which has been taken as a set of standard laws in library practice. DePriest (1973, p. 156) wrote: "librarians cannot afford to be merely separate and equal, because […] no other group other than faculty affords the essential protection". Darch (1975) conducted a study on *The Status of Professional Librarians in Nigerian Universities* and concluded that some librarians are deceiving themselves through lack of a real analysis of what their status is (Figure 1).

Darch's (1975) study went a long way to show that before the development of a code of ethics, there was a need for librarians to first understand their place in society. The regulating body, therefore, ought to be composed of professionals from different kinds of libraries in Nigeria, such as academic, public and private libraries. In that way, the interests of all librarians would be protected. Unfortunately, the NLA, despite its existence, is not represented online among other professional associations in Nigeria. This singular reason prompted Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri (2011) to undertake a study on "Professional Visibility of the Nigerian Library Association", and the result of the study revealed that the NLA is not as visible as other professions because of some of the possible factors outlined by the respondents who reasoned that probably the *Black Herald* magazine did not include the association in its list of professional associations in Nigeria. However, the few librarians who did not agree that the association is not visible maintain that the association is only an academic body whose renown does not go beyond the academic community, arguing that while professional bodies such as the Nigerian Medical Association and Nigerian Bar Association may be more well-known because of their direct contact with the public, the NLA may not because of the focus on teaching and learning (Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri, 2011).

Comparison with other professions in Nigeria

Various professions are recognized in Nigeria, and such associations have registering bodies that regulate the affairs of the association in terms of defining who should be a member of such association. For instance, the Nigerian Society of Engineers has a registering body, just as LRCN of NLA, called COREN (Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria). COREN is a body established by Decrees 55/70 and 27/92 (now Acts 110). The Decrees empowered the Council to regulate and control the training and practice of engineering in Nigeria, and to ensure and enforce the registration of all engineering personnel (i.e. engineers, engineering technologists, engineering technicians and engineering craftsmen) and consulting firms wishing to practice or engage in the practice of engineering (http://

Self-assessment of librarians' status

	Anglophone	Francophone	Arabic-speaking	Total
As Administration	5	4	2	11
As faculty	7	0	1	8
As separate group	0	3	0	3
Total	12	7	3	22

Figure 1.
Excerpt from Darch (1975)

tinyurl.com/cs9otyw). The primary duty of the members of the council is to determine who is to be called an engineer.

The Association of National Accountants in Nigeria (ANAN) has a code of conduct which is referred to as an Act. It is stated as an Act to establish that the ANAN charged, among other things, with the responsibility of determining the standard of knowledge and skill required of persons seeking to become members of the Association.

The Computer Professionals (Registration Council of Nigeria) sets and enforces the standards of competences, conduct and ethical practice for the information technology profession in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Council was established by the Computer Professional (Registration Council of Nigeria) Decree 1993, promulgated as Decree No. 49 on June 10, 1993 (http://tinyurl.com/c66aqcv). The Council is therefore empowered by law to set and enforce standards of competence and behavior for the profession, and determines who may or may not be a member of the profession. Most of these codes have a section on defining who a professional is among them. There is also this aspect of "relationship with colleagues". All the associations stipulated it in their code of ethics. The LRCN draft code has a section on legal rights of members. This is particularly lacking in the code of conduct for computer professionals. The NMA has a provision for legal rights of members in the code of conduct.

It has been observed, therefore, that most of the professional associations in Nigeria have codes of ethics, although not all are online. The NLA is fast coming up to the standard of the older professions in Nigeria.

Current trends in professional development and emerging LIS skills

Continuing professional development is an essential part of the modern library information professional's successful career planning and prospects. LIS professionals with better personal, professional and technological competencies have great opportunities and bright futures in modern libraries. Application of new information and communication technologies (ICT) in libraries immediately requires improvement of different kinds of skills and knowledge in the LIS profession. Continuous staff training on emerging technologies is essential to learn, improve and develop various kinds of professional skills, knowledge and competencies (Ahmad and Yaseen, 2009). Many librarians list conferences as major places for professional development. But beyond and above those, there are other avenues by which librarians can develop themselves depending on their readiness and willingness to widen their horizon and break new ground.

Technologies have created a new service environment that has pushed conventional boundaries much farther, with calculated risk and opportunities. In this environment, libraries that can survive are those that can react proactively to a broad spectrum of contemporary challenges that focus on speed, cost and quality. Professionals working in such libraries need continuous grooming by acquiring core competencies and new skills so that they do not become obsolete in this fast-changing environment. For this, they need to shift their focus from traditional library activities of collecting, processing, storing and accessing information to offer customer-centered automated information services, generated by using online/offline databases, e-resources, e-journals, networks and consortia, and so forth. Today, the majority of libraries are using computers and the latest ICT tools and techniques for performing various housekeeping jobs such as

acquisition, processing and serial control, and also for delivering various computerized services to their users. Technology is reshaping the world of academic libraries at an unimaginable speed.

Some application software are being applied in library operations so as to enable fast-tracking services to achieve the Ranganathan's fifth law (save the time of the reader). In saving the time of the reader, such software have been applied in the acquisition of book materials, cataloguing and classification, lending of books to readers and many more areas. Some libraries acquire software to achieve these goals, whereas others make use of open access (OA) software which they thereafter customize to suit their needs. Some OA software used in libraries include Glas, CDS/ISIS, Greenstone, Dspace, and Koha. Koha is being used by libraries that cannot afford to purchase more expensive and customized software. For the cataloguing of books, some libraries rely on online cataloguing instead of manual cataloguing books in the collection. For instance, in the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, cataloguers use online cataloguing of books, as well as manual cataloguing. To do the online cataloguing, they visit the Library of Congress online catalogue database, and input both descriptive and original cataloguing of their books online. They check for the books in their libraries' collections and look up the call number in Library of Congress database. This is faster than doing original cataloguing. Other ICT tools useful for libraries in Nigeria and beyond are Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and so forth. For instance, the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library at the University of Nigeria Nsukka has created a Facebook account where users read daily updates and can make comments too. These and more are such trends that help enhance library services to users and librarians are encouraged to keep abreast of these new technologies. Therefore, technologies must be utilized fully to meet the educational goals and objectives of the university in a strategic way rather than following these technologies blindly (Singh and Pinki, 2009).

Professionalism without adaptation to changes in the contemporary world is not something to be proud of. It is with this attitude of adopting new technologies and seeing how to apply them in one's field that professionalism is said to be alive, growing, practicable and impactful. As professionals, therefore, librarians must embrace the challenge of taking on new roles not to let even the library users grow ahead of them and become their teachers.

Aside from training acquired from library schools, workshops are of necessity to develop librarians' professional skills. There are current trends which librarians need to be aware of and go along with, especially before users are learn about such trends, so it is expected of librarians to attain mastery over such emerging trends to meet the demands of users. Such new skills involve, but are not limited to, information and knowledge management, web technology, working as a cybrarian (focusing on the Internet rather than on traditional librarianship), digital archiving, online cataloguing, digitization and data mining skills.

Research method

Descriptive survey design was adopted in the study across both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The area of the study was the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State. The population of the study comprised a total of 63 librarians at the two universities. All

librarians were sampled because of the small sample size. The instruments for data collection were oral interviews and questionnaires which contained 53 items derived from the research questions and built on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The criterion mean was 2.50. Therefore, any calculated mean below 2.50 was adjudged a negative score, while any mean from 2.50 and above was regarded as a positive score. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation and pilot tested in the Enugu State University of Technology Library, which was outside the study area. Out of the 63 questionnaires distributed to the respondents, 51 were completed and returned representing nearly an 88 per cent response rate. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents through personal contact by one of the researchers. In addition, there was also an oral interview of a few librarians in the management cadre to authenticate the information in the responses. Data were analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, mean and graphical representations.

Presentation of results

The researchers, in an effort to elicit responses on the first research question on what makes librarianship a unique profession, got the following results as shown in Table I.

The data show total agreement in favor of all the items purported to make librarianship a unique profession as depicted by all the mean scores above the mid-point value of 2.50.

The second research question examined efforts made by librarians in professional development. As represented in Tables II and III, responses show that librarians make a lot of efforts with regard to professional development. However, item 2 in Table II reveals that many librarians in these institutions are yet to obtain a PhD. Item 2 in Table III also shows that many do not teach in the library school.

To gauge methods used by librarians in learning about current trends in professional development, a variety of responses was elicited (Table IV).

The data show that librarians are on track with the current trends in the profession by engaging in a number of professional activities as shown by the mean scores above 2.5. Item 6 has the lowest mean score of 2.6 because many librarians are yet to engage in online conferences and workshops. These are still not very popular in these institutions.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Librarianship is a lucrative profession	30	19	2	0	3.50	A
2	Librarianship embraces all disciplines	31	18	1	0	3.58	A
3	Many people now want to study library science	19	23	6	1	3.25	A
4	Librarianship is not a difficult course to scale through	18	18	9	5	2.84	A
5	Librarians are regarded the same as academic staff	31	18	1	0	3.60	A
6	Librarians always have job offers at home and abroad	23	25	1	0	3.35	A
7	Librarians can work as consultants in many companies	20	26	4	0	3.27	A
8	Librarianship is a very prestigious profession	16	31	3	0	3.17	A

Table I.
What makes librarianship a unique profession?

Table V shows an overwhelming agreement in support of the benefits of professional development efforts by librarians with all the mean scores of 3.4 and above.

The results in Table VI show that respondents agree on the roles of professional bodies in promoting professionalism and excellence in Nigeria in items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8. However, scores for items 4, 5 and 9 are below the mid-point mean of 2.5, suggesting that the regulatory function of LRCN and the expensiveness of NLA do not promote professionalism.

The results show strong agreement in support of the various challenges faced by librarians in pursuit of professional development as depicted by all the mean scores being above 2.5 in Table VII.

In Table VIII, respondents completely agree on the enumerated strategies for the enhancement of professionalism and excellence in LIS as shown by the mean scores being far above 2.5.

S/N	Items	Yes		No	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	I have obtained my MLS since recruitment	31	60.78	9	3.11
2	I have obtained a PhD on the job	10	19.60	1	1.96

Table II.
Efforts made by librarians in professional development

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	I am involved in continuing education	18	26	2	4	3.13	A
2	I teach in the library school	12	9	13	13	2.27	R
3	I write articles for publication in journals and books	23	23	3	1	3.29	A
4	I brainstorm with fellow colleagues and mentors	25	24	1	2	3.41	A
5	I look out for mentors whom I can learn from	26	22	2	2	3.49	A
6	I attend conferences and workshops related to my field	29	17	2	1	3.41	A

Table III.
Efforts made by librarians in professional development

	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	I utilize social networks like Facebook, etc to collaborate	26	20	3	2	3.33	A
2	I attend annual conferences of NLA and learn from colleagues	31	17	4	0	3.58	A
3	I attend workshops within the profession	30	20	1	0	3.58	A
4	I participate in NLA's online forum to keep abreast	27	17	3	4	3.19	A
5	I learn new skills from colleagues	31	19	1	0	3.62	A
6	I participate in online conferences and workshops	18	12	9	11	2.66	A
7	I learn ICT skills from IT professionals outside librarianship	26	16	3	6	3.19	A

Table IV.
Methods for learning about current trends in professional development

Discussion

Librarianship has been adjudged a unique profession. The respondents gave compelling evidence to buttress this claim. Most of what was gleaned from the responses is that librarianship embraces all disciplines. Librarians in academic institutions are respected and accorded academic status, and also enjoy most of the privileges accruing to other faculty members. Librarianship as a profession is *Sui generis* and shares no peculiarity with any other. Melvin (1876) (in Entsua-Mensah, 2004) corroborates this when he proclaimed that the time had come when librarians may without assumption speak of their occupation as a profession – from the first, librarians have commanded great respect and much has been written of their priceless worth.

The study revealed that academic librarians in Southeast Nigeria are constantly on the march to professional development. Several have obtained a Master of Library Science which is in fact what qualifies them as academic librarians. Many are presently pursuing their doctorates vigorously and, from our interviews, a substantial number are on the verge of completing the programme. Many from their responses have published severally in reputable journals and books. To expedite growth in the profession, they

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	It makes me become a consultant in my profession	35	13	3	1	3.45	A
2	It offers me opportunities to compete with others	25	26	0	0	3.52	A
3	I gain exposure to many sites of professional development	31	20	0	0	3.56	A
4	I keep abreast of current trends in librarianship	36	14	0	1	3.76	A
5	My knowledge and skills expands	33	17	1	0	3.62	A
6	I become more enthusiastic about my profession	34	16	1	0	3.70	A
7	I get to meet with mentors/colleagues at workshops	34	15	1	1	3.62	A

Table V.
Benefits of professional development efforts by librarians

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	LRCN is a professional body that ensures members are competent	34	17	0	0	3.64	A
2	LRCN certifies librarians to promote professionalism	31	20	0	0	3.56	A
3	LRCN enforces licensure enabling only qualified librarians to practice which promotes professionalism	25	20	6	0	3.25	A
4	I do not like the regulatory function of LRCN	9	2	18	20	1.96	R
5	LRCN does not promote professionalism	4	6	18	21	1.88	R
6	The NLA encourages networking among professionals	25	23	1	1	3.37	A
7	The NLA also promotes professionalism through its annual conferences where librarians present papers	26	23	1	0	3.54	A
8	The NLA is an avenue for mentoring librarians	29	20	1	1	3.58	A
9	The NLA is expensive to attend and does not promote professionalism	6	5	15	23	1.92	R

Table VI.
The role of professional bodies in promoting professionalism and excellence in Nigeria

brainstorm with colleagues and mentors. The also attend workshops and conferences related to their field.

Several methods have been gauged by which these librarians acquire current trends in their profession, such as collaboration and social networking with colleagues, attending annual conferences of NLA, participation in the NLA online discussion forum with professional colleagues to gather first-hand information and networking with professionals outside librarianship in the area of ICT.

Benefits of professional development for librarians were succinctly espoused from the results of the study. These include offering librarians the opportunity to keep abreast of current trends, keeping librarians enthusiastic in their profession, offering opportunities for gainful and healthy competition and getting them exposed to mentors.

The role of professional bodies was also examined, and the study revealed that these bodies play a huge role in licensure and in determining who is qualified to practice. This ensures that members are competent. This in no small way promotes professionalism. The LRCN is one such body. The NLA also promotes professionalism by creating enabling workshops and conferences where professionals gather to present papers, interact with their peers and open up avenues for mentoring of professionals. However, the respondents revealed that the Association is expensive and not all librarians, particularly those new to the profession, can keep up with the dues.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	DE
1	Unwillingness of colleagues to share ideas and network	24	17	8	1	3.31	A
2	Lack of sponsorship to attend conferences/workshops	22	23	4	1	3.41	A
3	Lack of Internet facilities to keep abreast with trends	23	18	8	0	3.33	A
4	Lack of good professional mentors	18	20	11	1	3.15	A
5	Limited exposure to relevant and timely information	23	19	6	1	3.33	A
6	Being in the wrong profession; not doing the right job	14	17	13	0	2.92	A
7	Lack of resources like computers and smartphones	22	20	8	0	3.17	A

Table VII. Challenges faced by librarians in professional development pursuits

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	DE
1	Colleagues should be encouraged to share their ideas	41	10	–	–	3.82	A
2	Sponsorship of staff to attend conferences/workshops	36	14	–	–	3.70	A
3	Professionals must learn to collaborate in terms of publication output	39	11	–	–	3.78	A
4	Consortia building amongst libraries will enhance the sharing of resources among Nigerian academic libraries	37	13	–	–	3.74	A
5	International staff exchanges will enhance professionalism	37	13	–	–	3.74	A
6	Continuing professional development of staff	31	18	1	0	3.62	A
7	Creating opportunities for staff growth through sabbatical leave for academic librarians	35	15	–	–	3.70	A

Table VIII. Strategies to enhance professionalism and excellence in LIS

Challenges faced by librarians in the pursuit of professionalism include: lack of sponsorship to attend conferences and workshops, limited exposure to relevant and timely information (possibly because of lack of uninterrupted Internet facility to keep abreast of trends), dearth of professional mentors in the Southeast zone and slow acquisition of emerging ICT skills such as digital archiving, data mining and web technology skills. This last finding was a discovery from the interviews with senior members of the LIS profession.

The study also proffered strategies to enhance professionalism and excellence in the LIS profession, such as colleagues sharing ideas copiously with others, collaboration to enhance publication output, international staff exchange and encouraging sabbatical leaves. In the interview with some librarians in the management cadre, the librarians extensively discussed the need for sabbatical leave which hitherto was not common in the Southeast zone. They opined that an opportunity to work in other libraries across geo-political zones would help them imbibe certain skills and learn competencies needed to grow on the job. Recommendations of this paper arose not only from the study itself but also from the interaction of the researchers during the interview.

Recommendations

- There is a need for collaboration and partnership in the LIS profession in Nigeria. Libraries must learn to share both physical and human resources. This is a sure way of ensuring both institutional and staff growth.

- Staff development is very crucial for professional growth. Ezeani (2004) succinctly revealed that staff development widens the experience, exposure and practical knowledge of the staff in the practice of librarianship in general and the practice of the library he/she serves. Institutions must commit to staff development to ensure professional growth. Individual librarians are encouraged to commit to their own growth rather than wait all the time for their institutions to sponsor them. Staff development should always be seen as an investment and not an expense.

- Academic librarians must ensure that they work very hard in the area of research and publication output. The present day academic librarian has two demand cycles. One of service to the library's patron and second contribution to knowledge, these two must go *pari passu*. One of the universities under study has recently introduced publishing in Impact Factor journals as a criterion for assessment. This is a quality control measure which ensures that staff has the adequate visibility they need as scholars and that they can also be seen as global competitors rather than local champions. Academic librarians are not exempt from this, and therefore, need adequate exposure through international staff exchange and sabbatical programmes to help them scale up in this regard.

- Collaboration has become, at this stage, both inevitable and critical. Librarians must work towards co-learning, co-researching and producing quality information products.

- The LRCN and the NLA have so far discharged their duties creditably; however, more needs to be done in Nigeria to ensure than librarianship is accorded the same level of respect and prestige as other professions such as law, engineering and others.

- Marketing of library products will also go a long way in making the general public appreciate the contribution we make toward learning and research in our host institutions. This could be done by the creation of profiles of faculty members and sending information through Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) or Current Contents of journals to faculty as is presently done at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Conclusion

This paper examined the professionalism in the LISLIS field through an examination of current trends, needs and opportunities. In doing this, six specific purposes of the study were delineated to provide adequate coverage for the title. First was an examination of the value of librarianship as a profession, a study of the efforts made by librarians of the two institutions under study, the methods of acquiring current information at these institutions, the role of professional bodies in promoting professionalism in these institutions, challenges faced by academic librarians of these institutions and strategies to ameliorate these challenges.

The study revealed that in the Southeast zone of Nigeria, librarianship is a prestigious profession, and academic librarians are steadily making giant strides. Several are currently involved with their doctoral degrees, and have published in reputable books and journals. However, they are experiencing several challenges, including lack of funding for professional development, lack of sponsorship to workshops and conferences, lack of uninterruptible Internet facility and a dearth of professional mentors with, indeed, currently, a dearth of professors in the Southeast zone.

Strategies arising from the study and the interview with senior members of the profession are as follows: academic librarians must team up to enhance their visibility and publication output, improve opportunities for international staff exchanges and opportunities for sabbatical leave, promote collaboration and partnership in the LIS profession, endorse staff development by management since it shows a concern for staff, librarians should commit their own time and dollars to professional development, professional bodies should help in enhancing the visibility and prestige of librarians and effectively marketing library products as a means of enhancing the image of academic librarians.

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