

**Full Length Research**

# Professional Codes of Ethics for Librarians in Nigeria: An Appraisal for Effective Use in Libraries

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The Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) code of ethics for Librarians is to incorporate values, principles and standards for professionalism. But, apparently the code is not being used professionally. A study overview of code of ethics was conducted to revalidate its professional importance for adoption in libraries. The study adopted a semi-structured interviews with open ended questions to gather focused, qualitative textual data. The study population consisted of 110 professionals librarians in Oyo State. The interview responses and observational data were reviewed for insights of librarians to the codes of ethics and pattern of practice. Findings from the study show inter-alia that there are no objective benchmarks for assessing librarians conduct and discharge of professional duties, rather, assumed and subjective moral rules were guiding the library operations and practices. Therefore, the need as a matter to set up a code of ethics implementation task force is recommended.

**Keywords:** ethics for librarians, code of ethics, standards for professionalism, ethical promotion, Oyo State, Nigeria

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## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Librarians and Information Scientists in Nigeria are imbued to serve people through the provision and access to quality information resources in either print or electronic formats through which people's standard of living are improved, dreams are actualized, education is sustained, sound decisions are made and executed, freedom of expression is enhanced and information resources are preserved for posterity. The proliferation of information in different formats and complexity in retrieval processes have promoted and sustained the need for society to share resources, work, ideas and information.

This provides the rationale for library and information practice. The belief in the need to share information and ideas implies the recognition of information rights as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 19 which sets out the right to freedom of opinion, expression and access to information for all and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas in any media, regardless of frontiers (IFLA, 2011).

Interestingly, there are two school of thoughts just gathering momentum about an additional role of a Librarian in the information society. One is proposing that librarians should just be a web-browser (surfer, a human

search engine), that will be creating awareness and be disseminating information via the ICT to the information seeking society.

One the other hand, the librarians should be a webmaster that will not only surf the web but will be a Master of the web or the one who controls the web. That, the world is waiting for the librarians to control the web and spring out as an Information Super power for all other professionals in the whole world. We are to take control and be in custody of the electronic resources as it were the print!

Traditionally, libraries are institutions concerned with the collection, processing, documentation, storage and dissemination of information to their respective users. The important roles played by libraries in the society marks the beginning of librarianship and its growth globally. The advent of professional librarianship into Nigeria was dated back to the pre- independence days. Hence, it is one of the foremost professional Associations in Nigeria. Since this period, professional librarianship in Nigeria has really witnessed tremendous improvement. Among these developments is the establishment of the first public library in Nigeria, situated in Lagos in 1932, setting up of the first library school in West Africa in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1959, establishment of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) which currently has over 4000 members and the establishment of the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) 1997.

The goal of this research therefore is to review the use of Librarianship codes of ethics in Oyo State libraries.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In March 2013, a draft of the guiding principle for effective social responsibility for Librarian is provided by the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria on its websites for members, to guide the behavior of professional librarian, make best professional decisions and confront professional challenges for strong library and strong society. But, it was observed in practice that most librarians are not being guided by the drafted ethical codes neither was it enforced in Libraries. This supports Ofre (2012); Igbeka & Okoroma (2013), Onoyeyan, Ajayi, Adesina & Bamidele (2014) whose studies focused on Nigerian situation, the awareness and practicability of Librarianship ethics amongst librarians. Their studies reveals that majority of librarians do not have a copy of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria Code of Ethics. Nigerian Librarians and the awareness of the ethical values is quite low, the degree of practicability of many of the ethical codes is very questionable and that there has not been any case of confrontation and sanction in connection to the violation of the ethical values. Moreover, the strict adherence as a panacea to the confronting professional challenges is elusive. The

critical concern of this study therefore, is to re-appraise and elucidate the aforementioned claims. Hitherto, the study employs a pragmatic approach to conduct a semi-structured interview using Nigerian Library Association Oyo State chapter members as a case study.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to assess:

- a. the code of ethics for librarian in maintaining standards in libraries.
- b. the application level of the code of ethics for Librarian as a guide daily discharge of duties in libraries
- c. the objective benchmarks for assessing librarians conduct and discharge of professional duties.
- e. the sense of self-esteem, dignity, honour, service and moral rectitude of the librarian via the code of ethics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Codes of Ethics policy for Librarians in Nigeria is available in electronic form as its contemporaries. Such documentation was noted by Sturges (2009) while suggesting the need to look at other formal policy documentation described by such names as 'declaration', 'charter' or 'manifesto'. He mentioned for instance the African Conference on Information Ethics, held at Pretoria in 2007, issued a 'Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics in Africa' (<http://www.africaninfoethics.org/tshwanedeclaration.html>). The exception in Nigerian, context is the non-availability of the print copy and its ready circulation to all librarians, denoting its availability just in principle and usefulness yet un-adopted in practice.

Hoffman (2005) retrospectively amplifying the importance of professional ethics and librarianship, posited that professional ethics are the principles of conduct that govern an individual or a group. And that the American Library Association formally adopted its first code of ethics in 1939. The code he said underwent several revisions, the last in 1981, with adoption by ALA Council in 1995. In 2002, TLA Council adopted the ALA Code of Ethics as its professional code of ethics. It is doubtful if we have same written records of awareness, adoption and conscious application in Nigeria.

Sturges (2009), while discussing the code of ethics practice, manifestoes and charters he noted that in a code, the profession tells its members what they should consider when faced with an ethical dilemma, whilst demonstrating to a wider audience that the profession does not leave its members devoid of good guidance.

Else, in the end a professional makes a decision that may, or may not derive directly from the principles laid

down in a code. Because the nature of the dilemmas experienced by members of different professions varies, the codes vary too, but a brief look at a sample will indicate that there is commonality as well as singularity. He further reiterated the fairly recent codes for librarians as practiced internationally on ([www.ifla.org/faife/ethics/codes.htm](http://www.ifla.org/faife/ethics/codes.htm)) from (France, 2003; Italy, 1997; the Netherlands, 1993; Portugal, 1999; and Switzerland, 1998), which suggests that a user/profession/collection approach can be identified as a common method of organising the content of a code.

The Library as an institution exists for the benefit of any given constituency, whether it is the citizens of a community, members of an educational institution or some larger or more specialized group. Those who enter the library profession assume an obligation to maintain ethical standards of behaviour in relation to the governing authority, under which they work, to the library constituency, to the library as an institution, to fellow workers, to colleagues and to society in general. IFLA (2011, 2012, 2013) posits that the core mission of library and information professionals is to facilitate access to information for all for personal development, education, cultural enrichment, economic activity and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy. Librarians do have a social responsibility and a guiding principle to work with; they do not encourage censorship, denial and restriction of information to anybody by any person or groups of persons and use the most efficient and effective methods and standards to serve their clientele. The general purpose of the code therefore is to set guidelines for the ethical conduct expected of all librarians in Nigeria, and they are to adhere by it in Libraries.

In Nigeria, to legally practice as a librarian, such a person is required to register with the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The LRCN Act, Section 9 states that such a person must:

- a. Possess the requisite qualifications approved by the Council
  - b. Not being a Nigerian, hold a qualification granted outside Nigeria which for the time being is accepted by the Council and is by law entitled to practice for all purposes as a librarian in the country in which the qualification was granted; provided that the other country accords Nigerian professional librarians the same reciprocal treatment and that he/she satisfies the Council that he/she has sufficient practical experience as a librarian.
  - c. Be of good character
  - d. Not have been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty.
- Contrarily, there are many practicing Librarians that are not registered and no one is saddle with the responsibility

to enforce or monitor the efficiency of the code of ethics. Moreover, the specified roles of Librarians are:

### **1. Provision of information to the Nigerian citizens:**

Professional librarians can be regarded as "Information experts in the information age". Professional librarians provide accurate, timely and relevant information to Nigerians. This is ensured through the various information-oriented services offered by libraries to their clients. This accounts for the reason why libraries are found in private institutions, corporate organizations, schools, government agencies, ministries and parastatals.

When this information is made available for the citizenry, it increases their knowledge, reduces their level of uncertainty and enables them to make rational decisions in their daily activities.

### **2. Promotion of education and educational activities:**

Based on their training and experience, professional librarians support educational activities and contribute immensely to the advancement of teaching and learning in Nigeria. This is done through academic and school libraries attached to tertiary institutions, and school libraries respectively.

According to Aina (2004), "academic libraries are libraries attached to post-secondary institutions such as university, polytechnics and colleges of education. School libraries are libraries attached to schools: pre-primary, primary and secondary schools".

This function of professional librarians has been captured in the view of Hall (1986), who gave the roles of libraries in schools as follows:

- Provision of information services that respond to the information needs of teachers and students and which also foster their professional and personal development.
- Serves as a learning laboratory that provides opportunities for the students to develop information skills and other relevant skills.
- Serves as a ground for identifying the innate potentials and talents of students and developing them.
- Provides opportunities for the students to become self-directed learners and develop a commitment to lifelong learning.

### **3. Preservation of the societal culture:**

Culture has been defined as the way of life of human

being which embodies everything we do. As custodians of knowledge, professional librarians in Nigeria play the active roles of preserving vital elements of the societal culture.

Professional librarians preserve elements of societal culture such as artifacts, relics, arts and crafts, realia, poetry, poems, folklore, paintings, sculpture etc. thereby preventing them from going into extinction.

In addition to that, professional librarians ensure that vital documents, records and monuments are kept in favourable conditions for future purposes.

#### **4. Promotion of reading culture among children, youths and adults in Nigeria:**

Over 70% of the Nigeria populations are illiterates. This ugly trend is really affecting the development of Nigeria. In order to combat this problem, professional librarians in Nigeria have launched a massive campaign aimed at reviving and promoting reading culture among the Nigeria citizens.

As a result of this, professional librarians in Nigeria have embarked on the following:

- Facilitating and promoting book reading clubs.
- Suggesting appropriate books ("readers' advisory") for children of different reading levels, and recommending novels for recreational reading.
- Develop in pupils the ability to learn from books without teachers.

#### **5. Sensitizing people on the relevance of library through seminars, conferences and related programmes:**

Professional librarians in Nigeria play the important roles of making people to understand and appreciate the germane roles performed by libraries in the development of the society. They do this by organizing seminars, conferences, workshops and other programmes aimed at increasing people awareness about library and their services.

The Nigeria Library Association (NLA) organizes seminars and conferences regularly for librarians, student-librarians and members of the public. All these are aimed toward increasing people awareness about professional librarianship.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a semi-structured interviews with open ended questions to gather focused, qualitative

textual data. The study population consisted of 110 professionals librarians in Oyo State libraries. The interview responses and observational data were reviewed for insights of librarians to the codes of ethics and pattern of practice. The study assumed a pragmatic approach of the awareness level, use and influence of the professional codes of ethics by Librarians in Nigerian Libraries. A purposive sampling technique was used to interview the professionals on ground during the routine visit to the libraries in Oyo State. It was envisaged that it will contribute new knowledge on the policies, practices and promotion of the professional codes of ethics by Librarians in libraries.

## **Challenges of Professional Librarianship In Nigeria**

The professional and societal expectation of the ethical codes for conscious librarians is right application for a common societal good and never to harm by dis-use. But, the important roles played by professional librarians in Nigeria are being confronted by some challenges which are:

### **1. Lack of proper recognition of professional librarians in Nigeria:**

Most Nigerians are yet to know the important role played by professional librarians in Nigeria. As a result the profession is seen as "the work of the idle ones" and librarians as the quiet lots which cannot be associated with. This is even worsened by the fact that many primary, secondary school students and young people have never heard of professional librarianship, it is not seen nor listed as a career choice. It is not in the school curriculum and they do not know what it entails. Very unfortunate to know that most people that are in the professional till date gate-crashed into it, they get to know what the profession is all about in the library school!

### **2. Government apathy to professional librarianship:**

The Nigerian government shows a lackadaisical attitude toward professional librarianship in the country and the Libraries. They do not fund the Library nor are ready to purchase books for the National Library and its branches all over the country. What a strong indication of apathy, in spite of the 'bring back the book' propaganda project of the government. Up till date no special allowance or salary scales for Librarians. The established registration council members are yet to be constituted. Furthermore, at the ongoing national Confab, compared to other professional bodies, no delegate representation for the Nigerian Library Association or that of the Registration Council. This is contrary to section 18.1 of the Librarians code of ethics. As a result of this, the Nigerian

government has relegated professional librarianship in Nigeria.

### **3. Refusal of some professional librarians to adapt to the information age librarianship:**

Some professional librarians are reluctant to give up their old and crude ways of library practice as they are comfortable with it. They do not embrace new technologies, new ideas and innovations. No doubt, this kind of professional librarians cannot keep in touch with the information age librarianship. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is nauseating to still see an information professional having phobia for the information technologies medias. The traditional era is over the need to quickly adapt and embrace the new era skill for relevance, performance and productivity.

### **4. Inadequate funding of libraries in Nigeria:**

Emphasis on this phenomenon is a critical issue that must be urgently addressed. Most libraries in Nigeria are not funded and as a result of this, professional librarians are constrained to carry out their services effectively or at the mercy of the managers of their respective institution.

### **5. Non-political leadership**

(Adedokun, O.O. & Olorunsaye, J.O. article accepted for publication) noted that most Library managers are not politically inclined; they are not good at office politics rather were straight arrow managers on the overall. This has become a serious professional and library development challenge. The more political oriented a librarian the more accessible the library will be to the anticipated development and professional advancement. He posited that the managers must acquire the good office politics skills and using it to influence their institution's Chief Executive is imperative. Of necessity, the development of a collaborative relationship at all levels of their organization; finding out what would make them important; persuasively give support or contribute to situations where everybody gets to win. This will bring the needed recognition and accolades for winning administrative styles. The end to recluse life in the four walls of the offices for socialization must be a thing of the past. In essence, Librarians must be on the same team with all in the work environment

### **Adoption and practice of Policies**

It is noted in the codes that to be registered as a librarian one should have his/her name retained in the register, a person is required to comply with other requirements as stated in the LRCN Act regarding:

- a. Taking a course of training which is intended for persons who are seeking to become members of the profession and the Council considers is designed to confer on persons completing the sufficient knowledge and skill for the practice of the profession
- b. Licensing
- c. Mandatory Continuing Professional Development
- d. Annual subscription.
- e. Certificate of Experience
- f. Any other requirements that may be made from time to time

It is being observed that the officials of the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria are committed to the accomplishment of these other requirements but the Librarians negative response to oblige shows their degree of perception or non-awareness of the codes of ethics, the operational and binding effect. Librarianship in Nigeria adopts universal trends in education and practice. By implication, the Nigerian Library Association and or the Librarians registration Council of Nigeria are encouraged to accept to become members of IFLA and also adopt the international code of ethics for librarians and other information workers subject to modification to reflect internal national dictates Ike-Mbofung (2015).

### **The context of the codes**

The codes contain the obligations of librarians, such as:

- a. Professional Standards
- b. Professional Commitment
- c. Efficiency and Effectiveness
- d. Arbitration

Also, there are stipulated provisions for adherence in Libraries. The librarians should avail themselves of regular consult of the codes to guide its adherence and application in the library. Operationally, the code of ethics should be well promoted in libraries.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study reveals that despite the availability of the drafted Codes of Ethics in electronic format, majority of the information professionals were neither aware nor interested in having the code. This supports Igbeka and Okoroma (2013); Ike-Mbofung (2015). It also shows inter-alia that majority of the librarian do not have a copy of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria Code of Ethics; Supporting Onoyeyan, Ajayi, Adesina and Bamidele (2014). The finding also depicts that the sense of self-esteem, dignity, honour, service and moral rectitude of the librarians via the code of ethics is low. The implication of this would negatively contribute to information delivery

service and there would be demonstrative subjective benchmarks for librarians' conduct in daily discharge of professional duties. Affective sense of esteem, poor library standards maintenance will be poor and subjective moral rules were guiding the library operations and practices.

### Proposition for further study

Being mindful of the persistent unusual apathy of the government to the library development, societal derogatory perception of librarianship and the docility of the Librarian in the country, it now is imperative in the nearest future that the Professional members' study be conducted to examine the members' view and knowledge of professional ethics, members' agreement or disagreement with various provisions of the code and to explore the types of ethical situations encountered by Librarians. This will be used to identify areas for professional development related to ethics training for Association members. It is also become necessary so as to examine if there will be the need to set up a Task Force on Library Professionalism in Nigeria especially in the areas of Professional ethics, advocacy and leadership. Since the current Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarian Regulatory Council of Nigeria (LRCN) are not a force to be reckoned with as a pressure group. Nonetheless, since this paper is a pre-proposition, the reader is asked to accept the evidence of titles for the reason of clear suggestion, but, in principle it will enhance future major literature search for confirmation.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Apparently, the poor awareness level of the codes of ethics to the Nigerian Librarians and libraries is the bane of its practice and promotion in libraries. The prompt attendants of the Librarians to the Professional codes will substantially improve the society. Nigerians are waiting to see Librarians facilitate access to information for all personal development, education, cultural enrichment, economic activity and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy. Mobile, hybrid and virtual libraries will have to be development in the rural areas, in the cities, in all privately owned outfits, company's, Political party offices, Professional Association offices, government parastatals, in all local governments, in all primary and secondary schools for the promotion of reading culture and information access.

The popularity of the codes of ethics will help maintain a moral course of our chaotic times. Fundamental changes are needed at this critical time, ritual killings, Boko-haram set massacres, mass unemployment, fall in standard of education, financial insolvency untimely death, bad governance, corruption, suicide bombings,

etc. There must be a moral compass to guide leaders through the complex conflicts about how to act right. This will cultivate the spirit of competitive intelligence for performance and productivity.

It is imperative therefore that the librarians' code of ethics be widely circulated in print and electronic format to all librarians in Nigeria for its effective application professionally, as noted by Yahal and Adeeko (2015). Also, the need to set up librarians' code of ethics implementation task force is recommended to the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria as the regulatory body for effective monitoring and adherence. Finally, the wide circulation of the print and electronic copy of code of ethics to all librarians in Nigeria for its effective application professionally and the need to set up librarians' code of ethics implementation task force are recommended to the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria as a matter of urgency. The Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria must proactively work together with librarian and orientate them on need to indispensably employ the adoption of the drafted Codes of ethics for effective library standard maintenance.

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