

Status of Academic Librarians: A Case Study from Nigeria

This study reviews the status of librarians at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Developments can be divided into two periods: the first from the establishment of the university in 1962 until 1974 during which time librarians were regarded as academic staff; and the second from 1974, when a crisis was created by the government's acceptance of the report of the Public Service Review Commission, to 1978 when efforts were made by librarians as a group within the institution to effect a change.

LIBRARIANSHIP THROUGHOUT THE WORLD is in various stages of development, a development greatly influenced by social, economic, educational, and technological changes. These developmental stages in librarianship vary from one country to another, and even among different types of libraries within one country. Academic librarianship is no exception, and academic librarians must establish their status within their university systems. In some countries it has been a nationwide effort for these librarians, whereas in others librarians pursue their effort in their separate institutions. At certain times their struggles reach a crisis.

This study focuses on developments in the status of librarians at the University of Lagos in Nigeria. The University of Lagos, established by the University of Lagos Act in 1962, is one of the oldest of the thirteen universities in that nation. The oldest university dates from 1948. Four universities were established between 1960 and 1962. The remaining universities were founded in 1975, except for one that started as an institute of technology and became a full-fledged university in 1971. All thirteen Nigerian universities are financed by the federal government.

This study has been restricted to the Uni-

versity of Lagos, and it is not representative of the situation in the other universities. Because of differences in administrative policies and pressures, individual institutions give varying types of status to their librarians. It remains desirable, however, that librarians devise a single definition of the term *academic status*, and that they should all support this uniform definition if they are to be taken seriously by the university community and, in particular, by the teaching faculty.

At the University of Lagos, the library system includes the main library and the education library, both on the main campus, and the medical library on the campus of the College of Medicine of the university.

RECOGNITION OF ACADEMIC STAFF

The struggle of the academic librarians to secure and retain a particular status within the university system can only be appreciated when the reasons are understood. Thus it is pertinent to outline the status of the academic staff as it relates to other members of the university community. The academic staff is well regarded by the government as is clearly shown by the report of a commission set up by the government and submitted in 1971:

Nigerian universities, like universities elsewhere, are jealous of their institutional freedom. This is

Taofiq M. Salisu is a doctoral candidate in the School of Library and Information Science, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

as it should be, and the proposals that follow take full account of it. . . . the academic staff of our universities should be given a level of remuneration which takes the fullest account of their outstanding academic qualifications which will make them feel that they are justly treated relatively to others in the economy and which will enable us always to obtain and retain suitably qualified staff for the universities.¹

Government recognition of the academic staff of the universities in Nigeria is not, however, extended to other members of the university community whose duties are not academic. This is made clear by the same commission: "A distinction should be made between academic posts on the one hand and, on the other, posts the holders of which perform duties not different in essence from those performed in the civil service."²

Thus any group that can make any claim to academic standing will do so to attain the prestige attached to such posts.

STATUS OF LIBRARIANS

For the purpose of this paper academic status and faculty status are accepted as identical terms, with this definition from the Association of College and Research Libraries in 1959 used:

Academic status for professional librarians may be defined as the formal recognition, in writing, by an institution's authorities, of librarians as members of the instructional and research staff. The recognition may take the form of assigned faculty ranks and titles, or equivalent ranks and titles, according to institutional custom.³

The legislation that established the University of Lagos recognized the relationship between the excellence of library holdings and the caliber of librarians, as well as the crucial role of the librarians as participants in the processes of teaching and research. Hence this legislation stated that the librarians are academic members of the university staff:

All appointments to senior library posts shall be made in the same way as equivalent appointments in the academic staff and for such posts, other than of "librarian," the librarian shall be a member of the Selection Board.⁴

The selection board referred to here is a subcommittee of the appointment and promotions (A&P) board, which is responsi-

ble for the appointment and promotion of academic members of the staff. The selection board performs those duties on behalf of the A&P board. The "librarian" is the university librarian, the equivalent of the director of university libraries in the United States.

By virtue of this position, the librarian is a member of the selection board and sits on it except when being considered for a specific post.

Librarians in this category are those who are full professionals, and they enjoy the same rights and privileges as the academic teaching staff. They are usually referred to as academic library staff to distinguish them from the other members of the library staff within the university library system who are not professionals.

The academic library staff, then, using the words of Anita Schiller are: "employees doing work that requires training and skill in the theoretical or scientific aspects of library work as distinct from the mechanical aspects."⁵

Since the founding of the University of Lagos, and under the provisions of the act that established it, the librarians are ranked identically with teaching faculty. Table 1 shows the parity of ranking between academic teaching staff and academic library staff.

Academic status for librarians in the University of Lagos entitles them to the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as members of the academic teaching faculty. These include corresponding rights to rank, promotion, tenure, leaves, and research grants. Librarians undergo the same process of evaluation and meet the same standards as the academic teaching staff.

TABLE 1
TEACHING AND LIBRARY RANKS,
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, AS ESTABLISHED
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS ACT*

Academic Teaching Staff	Academic Library Staff
Professor	University Librarian
Associate Professor	Deputy University Librarian
Senior Lecturer	Senior Librarian
Lecturer I	Librarian I
Lecturer II	Librarian II
Assistant Lecturer	Assistant Librarian

*University of Lagos, *Annual Report, 1973-74* (Lagos: University of Lagos, 1975), p.61. Tabulation prepared by author.

Librarians take part in the internal governance of the institution as they are also elected to the senate and other committees of the university on the same basis as their teaching counterparts. Membership on academic and other university committees is a measure of acceptance by the faculty and administration. McAnally also noted: "If the classroom faculty at an institution utilize the committee system in conducting certain departmental and college affairs, then the library should do likewise."⁶

The library also operates as do other academic units on decisions relating to appointments and conditions of service. Tenure does not, however, come automatically with every appointment, particularly at the lower levels. The granting of tenure comes later, usually after the first three years of successful professional practice. At some other levels, where the librarian appointed has secured tenure in a previous position, the tenure is automatically transferred to the new position.

From the time a librarian without tenure is appointed to the time of qualification, clear evidence must be shown that the granting of tenure is appropriate, usually at the end of the probationary period. If there are no reasons otherwise, tenure is granted. But if it is not granted, the librarian can petition the appointments and promotions board through the head of the department (the university librarian).

The emphasis on tenure, particularly for librarians, is to assure them of academic freedom in book selection and dissemination of information and advice to their users, all essential factors in the academic environment.

The librarians at the University of Lagos receive the same salaries for an academic year as do other faculty members of the same rank. They also enjoy the same leaves as other academic members of staff, including sabbatical and research leaves. They receive these leaves on the same basis and with the same requirements as do other faculty members. It is apparent that, for librarians to maintain an academic tradition, they must contribute to academic activities as well as to the literature of the profession. To be able to do this, however, librarians need time. In recognition of this need,

librarians are not tied to the exigencies of the twelve-month appointment. There is some time allotted to undertake such academic activities.

Promotion of librarians at the University of Lagos is based on the general requirements for promotion within the academic hierarchy. Librarians must show evidence of ability to perform at a high professional level in areas that contribute to the educational and research mission of the university, such as reference services, bibliographic services, and collection development. Beyond this general statement on level of performance, criteria are established for promotion to specific ranks. These criteria and procedures are the same for the other members of the academic staff as well.

Librarians are eligible for membership in the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT). In addition, librarians at the university play an important role in the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and have held offices at the local and national levels.

As much as the librarians enjoy academic status at the University of Lagos, there are some limitations that are unknown in usual academic circles. There can be only one librarian at the professorial grade at any given time. Only one deputy university librarian with associate professor rank is provided for in the system. Librarians have made efforts in the past to change this situation, because such limitations place a barrier on the aspirations of the librarians in the system. At the same time it can discourage good librarians from joining the system.

It is obvious that there is no privilege without responsibilities, and there is no status without commensurate qualifications. In the words of Bernard Barber: "The greater the amount of knowledge or responsibility, or the two in combination required for performance in a given role the higher the stratification position of the incumbent of that position."⁷ This knowledge should be systematic and generalized, "not just long training in manual dexterity as for an athlete for example."⁸

For librarians, therefore, to be appointed to the academic cadre of the University of Lagos, there are certain qualifications. The

basic qualification for a librarian at the beginning grade level is postgraduate training. This may be met by the postgraduate diploma in librarianship (P.G.Dip.Lib.) of the University of Ibadan; by the master of library science (M.L.S.) of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (the two universities in Nigeria with library schools); by the Associate of the Library Association of any British accredited library school as long as it is obtained at the postgraduate level; or, finally, by the master of library science (M.L.S.) from an accredited graduate library school in the United States.

Some graduates with bachelor's degrees in subject areas of particular interest to the library other than library science are employed by the library as the equivalent of graduate assistants in the teaching units with a view to their attending a library school within one year from the date of appointment. The appointment of this category of staff, called librarian-in-training, serves to attract those graduates with special subject backgrounds. These graduates have in the past been appointed in the areas of science, technology, and engineering. Such appointments are made, and subsequent training given, with the understanding that these individuals will return to work with the library for a specified minimum period of time.

THE CRISIS

The foregoing description represents the situation of librarians at the University of Lagos from its establishment in 1962 until 1974 when matters took a new turn. At that time the government accepted the report of a commission set up in 1973 to study and review salaries and wages of workers employed by the government and quasi-government institutions throughout the country.

The commission, the Public Service Review Commission, was established as a result of labor unrest in the country, a situation caused by increasing inflation and lagging salaries. The commission's report affected dramatically both the civil service and the universities. Many protests were staged, and representations were made to the government about the commission's recommendations and the government's acceptance of them.

The effect on librarians was particularly unfortunate. Although the National Library made a presentation to the commission during its hearings, the commission ignored the statement from librarians in universities and colleges. All librarians, on the basis of the presentation from the National Library, were grouped together. Librarians were classified as administrators, regardless of the institution in which they worked.

Previously, university staff considered administrators were those in the bursar and registrar's offices. This decision marked the beginning of a difficult period for academic librarianship and for the status of librarians at the University of Lagos. The events of the next four years served as a turning point in the history and practice of librarianship at the university. Morale was seriously affected, and finally librarians decided they must work as a team to restore and maintain their status in the university.

The report simply classified librarians as administrators but set up no structure for them. The librarians were thus abandoned in the "middle of the road," placed in the administrative hierarchy but with no structure. As a result of general protests from the Nigerian labor force, the government set up the Public Service Review Panel to make necessary adjustments. Decisions of this panel are regarded as final without further representations permitted. No institution was allowed to effect any change in the final decision without referring it to the review panel and receiving its approval.

The university was in a dilemma: as much as the head of the institution and most faculty members were dissatisfied with the situation, there seemed to be nothing they could do. The librarians were stripped of the privileges they had enjoyed as members of the academic staff, but they were still expected to fulfill those responsibilities that justify these privileges. Hence librarians were still academic staff by function and responsibility but without concomitant privileges.

The commission's report made librarians think of a joint effort, and they combined forces to bring about a change in their situation. The Committee of University Librarians, composed of library directors, met and decided to present a joint memorandum to the government on the issue. Their paper

was submitted through the Committee of Vice-Chancellors to the National Universities Commission for eventual forwarding to the Public Service Review Panel. The government has as yet given no response to the statement.

A SOLUTION AT LAGOS

In the interim, each university library was expected to make internal adjustments in its individual institution, pending the resolution of the concerns expressed in the joint memorandum.

At the University of Lagos it was difficult to fit librarians into the administrative hierarchy, and so a compromise was achieved. Unfortunately, through it four of the six library ranks were placed one step lower than previously. Table 2 shows this new arrangement.

To correct these disparities, librarians at the university offered numerous recommendations: the first was the abolition of the post of assistant librarian, grade level 08, and the substitution of a librarian-in-training rank at that level. A professionally qualified librarian would be appointed to the system as a librarian II, grade level 09, the same level as assistant lecturer. Such a solution would satisfy the new entrants, as they would be equated with their traditional counterparts in the teaching faculty, regardless of the title.

It was also recommended that the rank of deputy university librarian be raised to senior deputy university librarian at grade

level 15, a level proposed for associate professor.

Librarians also believed promotional levels should be expanded to facilitate upward mobility. Their proposals are summarized in table 3.

These recommendations were presented to the university senate through the vice-chancellor and have been accepted as a "local" arrangement. Situations in other universities vary immensely, depending on the efforts made by the librarians themselves and the legislation or authorization that established each of them. Every university library still awaits the outcome of the presentation of the Committee of University Librarians, still with the Public Service Review Panel. Some of these recommendations, however, are already being implemented at the University of Lagos.

It should be noted that the university librarian was extremely active in defense of faculty status and support of his staff's position. With this relatively favorable outcome at Lagos, librarians became more active and involved in campus activities. They saw the need for their adequate representation in the university senate and accordingly took greater interest in it.

CONCLUSION

With the current awareness of the need for a proper status for librarians throughout the country and the establishment of the Committee of University Librarians, the future looks bright for academic librarianship in general. Librarians at the University of

TABLE 2

TEACHING AND LIBRARY RANKS,
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, AS DETERMINED
FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC SERVICE
REVIEW COMMISSION REPORT, 1974*

Grade Level	Academic Teaching Staff	Library Staff
16	Professor	University Librarian
14	Associate Professor	Deputy University Librarian
13	Senior Lecturer	—
12	—	Senior Librarian
11	Lecturer I	—
10	Lecturer II	Librarian I
09	Assistant Lecturer	Librarian II
08	Graduate Assistant	Assistant Librarian

*University of Lagos Library, "Udoji Commission Gradings of University Library Staff: A Petition for the Restoration of Academic Parity of the Senior Library Staff with the Teaching Staff," 1975, p.5.

TABLE 3

PROPOSED TEACHING AND LIBRARY
RANKS, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS*

Grade Level	Academic Teaching Staff	Academic Library Staff
16	Professor	University Librarian
15	Associate Professor	Senior Deputy University Librarian
14	—	Deputy University Librarian
13	Senior Lecturer	Principal Librarian
12	—	Senior Librarian
11	Lecturer I	—
10	Lecturer II	Librarian I
09	Assistant Lecturer	Librarian II
08	Graduate Assistant	Librarian-in-Training

*University of Lagos Library, "Recommendations for the Appointment, Promotion and Weighting of Academic Library Staff Submitted to the Senate," 1978, p.2. Tabulation prepared by author.

Lagos took steps in the right direction, and their action may serve as a model for other Nigerian university libraries. Librarians at these other universities may have to fight within their individual institutions until the joint efforts of librarians, library associations, and various committees yield results. These groups might even use the current structure at the University of Lagos as a model for a national program. Even though the future seems bright, a concerted effort is still needed to achieve success at the national level.

New activities in the Nigerian Library

Association will add to the enhancement of these results and will improve the lot of librarians. Librarians from the University of Lagos have spearheaded the establishment of the Association of Academic Librarians as a division of the Nigerian Library Association for the general interest of the profession and for the particular interest of academic librarians. Thus the entire association has awakened to the needs and aspirations of academic librarians, and there are better prospects ahead for the profession in general and academic librarianship in particular.

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