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### Repositioning Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) for Integration and Registration of Paraprofessionals

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Abstract: Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) has greatly increased the impetus of librarianship in Nigeria and among professionals, thereby making it a pride to behold. The profession is a communal one having only one value of trade to help harness, organize, secure, store and retrieve information when the need arises. This paper advocates the integration and registration of paraprofessionals by LRCN because they are major stakeholders in the delivery of library and information services and occupy the base and mid layers of the personnel pyramid of practicing librarians in Nigeria. The paper leveraged on recognised library cadres and educational qualifications to advocate for the inclusion of paraprofessionals by LRCN. Amending the law that established LRCN may resolve the challenge. When implemented it will be a win-win to LRCN and those certificated by its accredited institutions across Nigeria. LRCN will have its mission and vision actualized and members guaranteed benefits such as well-established career paths, recognition by their parent institutions and an arbiter when the need arises.

**Keywords:** Integration, LRCN, Nigeria, paraprofessionals, professionalism, professionals, repositioning

#### Introduction

The existence of librarianship in Nigeria dates back to the 1900s. However, the

formal institutionalisation of the profession and training started in 1953 with the UNESCO Seminar. The formal inauguration of training courses for library cadres at Ibadan was also marked during that period. Other benefits of the seminar across the West African subregion include the establishment of public libraries and formation of the West African Library Association (WALA). Whong and Kasa (2014) reported that it was during the seminar that the modus operandi of the profession were actualised in Nigeria. In addition, they argued that the conference facilitated the establishment of more libraries and eventually the formation of Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962 to take charge of the professionals in Nigeria. The NLA membership grew steadily at first nationally, regionally and later operated as state chapters with the creation of states. The state chapters of the NLA strengthen the educational system at micro-levels, facilitate and support access, retrieval, subscription and storage of information and provide responsive resources. services.

Ogwu (2010) defined repositioning as a adjustments. of period Gillespie, Chaboyer, McInnes, Kent, Whitty and Thalib (2014) viewed repositioning as a process which involves moving into a profitable and favourable sphere but in a different position. So repositioning of LRCN to include paraprofessionals is envisaged to correct identified lapses which such exclusions caused. These paraprofessionals man technical and numerous sensitive positions. They have qualifications that range from diplomas in certificates to library science/studies. **Apart** repositioning challenges, the need to integrate these categories of staff is

pertinent to encourage them develop and become recognised professionals. The need to develop a framework that is futuristic to achieve and overturn the confusions caused by nomenclature, curriculum and accreditation of library science programmes and certificate awarded in Nigeria is long overdue. The Council is by now expected to have metamorphosed into a standard examination body certifies that candidates, facilitate promotions and support employment uniformly in the country.

The concerns of this paper have earlier been expressed by other authors (Kasa, 2012; Uchendu, Aniche & Ezebuiro, 2016). They called for the inclusion of all cadres of library staff in the affairs of librarianship. For instance, Kasa (2012) opined that failing to include all paraprofessionals professionals and the could truncate benefits expectations of librarianship. Librarianship and librarians could find it very difficult to gain space in the already competitive information world. numerical strength paraprofessionals is argued by Uchendu, Aniche and Ezebuiro (2016) to be able to contribute immensely to LRCN.

taken, care is not attracting newcomers into the profession may become illusive. Note that a trained library staff, whether professional or paraprofessional, academic or nonacademic. works facilitate to knowledge, access and retrieval of information resources that can influence decision making.

#### Rationale and thrust of the paper

The decree establishing the LRCN, like most decrees in Nigeria, needs some

level of amendments through legislation. For instance, while the decree specifically focuses on professional cadre, it does not look at the operational and tactical cadres which have most of the staff strength and are very important stakeholders of the profession in Nigeria. These categories of workers are popularly referred to as paraprofessionals because they assist the professionals in getting work done. If the registration of these operational and tactical staff is not within the mandate of LRCN, a question that is begging for "Which profession answer is professional body would be responsible for their regulations?" Can they work in an environment regulated by LRCN and belong elsewhere? For LRCN to be a world class regulatory body and be able to attain professional excellence, it would not be out of place to recognize and integrate these paraprofessionals accordingly, as has been done with other professional councils in Nigeria. Therefore, it is necessary to examine other regulatory councils and to adapt the path they followed to gain the massive recognition, solidarity and support they enjoy today.

#### Librarianship as a profession

Yaya and Adeeko (2016) posited that librarianship is a profession that satisfies the needs of information seekers. It provides services that is aided by selected, acquired, processed, arranged, classified and organized information practice, resources. As a library professionals are managers custodians of organized knowledge stored in libraries. As in an academic field, the professionals teach, supervise, undertake researches and support the

information needs of their communities. Librarianship in both practice and academic influences the information needs and survival of the society. It ensures that professionals facilitate and support with appropriate services and resources that can significantly decision making. influence Librarianship as a field of study also accommodates other professionals by allowing them subject serve as specialists. during ensures that acquisition. and arrangement classification of resources meant for use are accessible, available and retrievable. Additional services are offered such that and encourage ease the use contributions of intellectual materials for visibility and bridging gaps in knowledge. Librarians use the training they acquired to become professionals and facilitate the use of different resources and service platforms and tools for the purpose of research, learning, teaching, leisure and entertainment.

Kasa (2012) opined that librarianship prepares individuals for careers as practicing librarians, academics, researchers, and information specialists that are primarily concerned with the evaluation, processing, storing and retrieving information within instituted codes of ethics. This suggests that, professionals possess knowledge in a specialised field and are committed to a code of conduct or set of values (Lester, 2010).

Magali (1977) classified profession into four groups according to the period when they gained prominence and were revered by the society. The ancient professionals comprise – the priesthood,

librarianship, university teaching, and law. In the medieval period, trades that were recognised as profession include surgery, dentistry and architecture. During the industrial era, the profession gained prominence engineering. The various groups that emerged from the inception of the century twentieth include social workers. teachers. accountants and personnel managers. To Lester. professionals are people with requisite skills that gain experience after attaining a vocation. The vocational training supplies necessary knowledge and skills that characterise a professional in terms of competence, efficiency, effectiveness and belongingness to a profession. In addition, most professionals are subject to strict codes of conduct enshrined in rigorous ethical and moral obligations (Kasa, Nuhu & Gani, 2017).

Mbofung and Popoola (2014) attested that members of a professional practice are guided by standards of practice and ethics. These standards of practice and maintained by widely ethics are recognised associations for consistency, competence and/or character. Undoubtedly, librarianship as profession helps its professionals understand and apply standards, values and ethics in the course of discharging their responsibilities. Pan and Hovde (2010) advocated for bridging gaps of knowledge and competence through continuing education and those gained on-the-job-training. For instance. degrees awarded after the completion of library and information science and allied programmes are expected to present graduates that are competent for positions in library and information

science. They are also expected to assume roles of service providers and in assisting patrons with the process of completing their scholarship tasks.

Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria can leverage on the numerous submissions in this paper to mount to the top of librarianship affairs in the country such as awarding certifications for sequence of levels that justifies attaining professionalism. Paraprofessional serve as supporting staff, and possess experience that can be harnessed in areas of research and publishing, yet they are excluded by the LRCN.

## Paraprofessionals in libraries and information centres: Who are they?

"Paraprofessional is a job title given to persons in various occupational fields, such as education. healthcare. engineering, law and librarianship, who are trained to assist professionals. The paraprofessional is able to perform tasks requiring significant knowledge in the field. and mav even function independently – with little or no direct professional supervision, but lacks the official authority of the professional" (Iwu, 2011).

Paraprofessionals in libraries occupy the operational and tactical cadres. Taking two third of the staff strength makes them very important stakeholders of the profession in Nigeria. These categories of workers assist the professionals in getting work done in areas such as technical services, customer services and reference services. Table 1 gives a comprehensive list of cadres and the salary levels of paraprofessionals in libraries in Nigeria. The table reveals that each paraprofessional serving

within the confined level plays significant roles and has a clear and

consistently defined portfolio which cannot be ignored.

Table 1: Paraprofessionals' cadre in library and respective salary scale in Nigeria

Nomenclature of cadre	Salary scale
Library attendant	2
Library assistant	3
Senior library assistant	4
Assistant library officer	5
Library officer	6
Higher library officer	7
Senior library officer	8
Principal library officer	9
Assistant chief library officer	11
Chief library officer	12

Source: ABU, guidelines for appointment and promotion of staff (2017)

Paraprofessionals in librarianship are required to possess both soft and hard skills (hard skills comes in form of inhouse certificate. The duties of library paraprofessionals comprise the following:

- Shelving and re-shelving
- Charging and discharging of library materials
- Overseeing the Compilation of statistic of readers/books used
- Supervising junior library staff in their various library operations
- Cataloguing and processing new library resources
- Bibliographical checking of newly suggested library resources to avoid duplications
- Filing and refilling catalogue cards Okojie and Abdulraheem (2013), acknowledged the synergy between professionals and paraprofessionals in libraries spread across Nigeria, and reported that the responsibilities of these libraries are communally performed. Whong and Kasa (2014) argued for the support and sustenance of communal

efforts because it translates to the desired effective and efficient service delivery in libraries. They see it as attainable when there is harmony between information professionals and the information environments control. Accordingly, Brophy (2003) development mirrored the information professions by beaming on the definition of their responsibilities functions, setting professional guidelines and ethical standards as pedestal for sustaining professionalism. These are within the purview of LRCN to seek legislation that will enable the council modify its statutes to include paraprofessionals. This could appropriate for the council to conform to the emerging trends, aggregate societal operating systems and placing high premium on values that can avert resistance to librarianship.

# Establishment of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN)

Decree 12 of 1995 established the Librarians' Registration Council of

Nigeria (LRCN) was signed into law by General Sani Abacha, the then Head of State as the regulatory agency for librarians in Nigeria. The LRCN Statistical Digest (2013) states the LRCN main vision is to be a "worldclass regulatory body that provides a platform for the delivery of quality library and information services in Nigeria". The mission is to attain professional excellence through induction, apt programmes targeted at retooling. educating institutionalization of professionalism in the field (Shehu, 2012). This marked a defining moment for librarianship in Nigeria.

addition, LRCN develops benchmarks for library and information science (LIS) accreditation and is also responsible for setting the minimum standard for the establishment of libraries. It is a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education, responsible for ensuring professional pursuing and excellence of librarians. and requisite qualifications for registration of such professionals to the workplace Nigeria. The recognition librarianship by government is weighted to be at par with other professions in Nigeria particularly law, teaching, medicine and engineering. Akpabio cited in Shehu (2012) itemized the roles

of LRCN and operational terms as follows:

- Determine who are librarians;
- Determine the standards of knowledge and skills that are to be attained by persons to become registered librarians and reviewing those standards from time to time as circumstances may require;
- Securing the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice the profession and the publication, from time to time, of such lists of persons;
- Maintaining discipline within the profession; and
- Performing such other function as may be conferred upon the Council by Act establishing it.

registers/inducts LRCN librarians that have first degrees in Library and Information Science as well as those who after obtaining first degree in other fields possess higher degrees (masters and doctoral degrees) in Library and Information Science. Table 2 shows the geographical spread of some of the accredited universities LRCN have registered/inducted graduates in Nigeria. The table excluded tertiary institutions (another contention for LRCN) particularly those awarding Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) certificates in librarianship.

Table 2: Accredited universities and popularity of librarianship in Nigeria

S/No	University	Year of Establishment
1	Abia State University, Uturu	1981
2	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	1988
3	Adeleke University, Ede	2011
4	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	1962
5	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	1980
6	Bayero University, Kano	1975
7	Baze University, Abuja	2011

Allahde Shehu & Mathias G. Kasa		CJLIS (2019) 2(1) 55-67
8	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002
9	Benue State University, Makurdi	1992
10	Delta State University, Abraka	1992
11	Federal University of Technology, Minna	1982
12	Federal University of Technology, Yola	1981
13	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai	2005
14	Imo State University, Owerri	1992
15	Kwara State University, Ilorin	2009
16	Madonna University, Okija	1999
17	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	1992
18	Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu – Ode	2005
19	Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina	2006
20	University of Calabar, Calabar	1975
21	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	1948
22	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	1975
23	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	1975
24	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1960
25	University of Uyo, Uyo	1991

Source: LRCN statistical digest 2013

#### The Case for Registration and Integration of Paraprofessionals in LRCN

The debate to justify the relevance and contributions of librarianship to the development of the society in Nigeria is no longer debatable with the inception of an instituted Council which is tirelessly working for professional harmony. Registering and integration of paraprofessionals by LRCN does not erode the unprecedented efforts and determination by all the forerunners whose struggle saw to the establishment of the LRCN (Okojie, 2011). However, it is acknowledgeable that membership drive, clear career path and ways to best address issues affecting librarianship and stakeholders perception cannot be achieved with a divided house. The LRCN statutory mandate could probably be coupled in haste, nevertheless, it is now several years after, and suffices that

there is subjugation of internal and external challenges that the statutes are causing the profession. For instance, recognising, including and addressing the internal dichotomy of who is a professional and paraprofessional could help the profession flourish. Therefore, making a case for registration and integration of paraprofessional in LRCN should be welcome suggestion. a Perhaps, because other councils have integrated and registered paraprofessional members in Nigeria. What is obtainable from other professional councils in Nigeria, suggests that LRCN can adopt or adapt processes of integrating registering paraprofessionals. Teachers Registration Council Nigeria of (TRCN); the regulatory agency the Council for the teachers. and Regulation of Engineers in Nigeria (COREN); the regulatory agency for

#### Allahde Shehu & Mathias G. Kasa

engineers included all cadres within the purview of the profession and are today amiable, stable and recognised. What COREN and TRCN considered before the integration and registration of members can help LRCN. The two councils are dynamic, in some instances,

they recognize nomenclatures of professionals as the basis for integration and registration. Table 3 shows some of the popular nomenclature and qualifications occupied and possessed by paraprofessionals in Nigerian libraries.

Table 3: Nomenclature and qualifications of library cadres in Nigeria

Nomenclature	Qualification
Librarians	Bachelors and Masters Degrees
Principal library officer	HND in library science
Library officer	ND/OND in library science
Library attendant/assistant	SSCE/Certificate courses in library science

Source: Field work 2019

According to COREN, there are four categories of registration for its professionals, and that the integration and registration consider these categorisation (Table 4) of professionals

and paraprofessionals. Table 4 gives the nomenclature and qualifications of integrated and registered COREN members in Nigeria.

Table 4: Nomenclature and qualifications of registered members of COREN in Nigeria

Nomenclature	Qualification
Engineers	Bachelor's of Engineering (B. Engine)
Engineering Technologists	HND in Engineering
Engineering Technicians	ND/OND in Engineering
Engineering Craftsmen	Certificates from technical colleges/SSCE

Source: COREN handbook 2009

The TRCN integrate and register her members by categorisation (Table 5). Table 5 shows the different qualifications and categories of

registered membership of the TRCN. The categories are divided into four (4) according to qualifications recognised by the council.

Table 5: Qualifications and category of registered members of Teachers'

Registration Council Nigeria (TRCN)

Qualification	Category
PhD in Education, or PhD in other field + NCE, PDE, PGDE	A
M.Ed/ M.sc (Ed) or Masters in other fields + NCE, PDE or PGDE	В
B.Sc (Ed)/ B.Ed or Degree in other field+ NCE, PDE or PGDE	С
NCE	D

Source: TRCN Annual report 2010

The LRCN cannot wish away the integration of members because integration includes vast range of human relationships and attitudes. Egbefo (2015) defined integration as a process that ensures societies and political systems are held together. Majeed (2014) opined that integration brings together cultural and social discrete groups into a single territorial unit, and facilitating the establishment of identity. However, Nwaji (2011), contextualized integration as the harmonious personal adjustment of an individual to the standards, demands and responsibilities of the society. The authorposited the harmonious adjustment within fusion or interaction that interrelate values and functions of individual and/or groups into an identifiable single entity with common attributes, goals, purposes and objectives.

Librarian Registration Council Nigeria has contributed immensely to the recognition of other professionals in the country. It is obvious that a large number of paraprofessionals who are yet to be integrated and recognised by the council are not happy. They constitute major stakeholders in the delivery of library and information services in Nigeria. The LRCN is disposed to amend its establishing statutes to be repositioned. It will be a welcome development and an assurance that it is responsive like other regulatory councils Nigeria. Therefore, the LRCN establishment decree needs he amended the to accommodate integration and registration of paraprofessionals.

The supposition is premised on the fact that the council has draft men, academics, practitioners and legislation knowledge among its integrated and registered members who will be ready to include the large followership when

paraprofessionals are included to the fold, particularly those ready to pride themselves as professionals. The council sensitisation efforts across the country are acknowledged because it has helped to enrich the council with the felt needs of professionals. It is time to examine the factors necessary to improve and sustain membership, influence the effectiveness and efficiency of professionals irrespective of service delivery domain academic or practicing. Therefore. focusing on additional stakeholders. extant particularly paraprofessionals at this point and time is desirous. Perhaps, because LRCN has come of age, it has been deliberate at expending time and scheduling training programmes response to the sensitive plight of its members.

#### Benefits of Registering and Integrating Paraprofessionals in LRCN

The concern of this paper is that the professional development LRCN programmes (workshops, seminars and conferences) may not be effective because the majority who are at the operational and tactical levels practicing librarianship may be disenfranchised. It is also inevitable that patronage may be very low with time even though these professional development programmes foster both specific skill-sets and diffuse aspects of professional code of ethics, altruism and support. Integration and registration of paraprofessionals will expand participants at LRCN workshops seminars, and significantly contribute to professional development and recognition of the Council.

These training programmes benefit both the individuals and the institutions they belong. The programmes facilitate and support sharing of work experience and

new tools for retooling purposes in both academics and practicing librarians. For the individual, the on-going process of acquiring new information and skills promotes competencies, iob performance upgrades and promotion. At the institutional levels, professional development aligns with "life-long learning" goals. Therefore, the benefits of integrating and registering paraprofessionals will be all-inclusive, providing a platform for appropriate professional development programme, offering LRCN a corporate strategy for responding dealing with and appropriately to challenges, and having tangible number of members who in harmony, can ensure and guarantee the progress of the profession. Since LRCN has reiterated this to be one of its specific objectives, then the inclusion of paraprofessional personnel is inevitable to reap this benefit.

Suggesting to LRCN to include the registration of paraprofessionals is not merely to enlarge its scope, selfconfidence of the members, but also to enhance productivity and overall job satisfaction among those who choose librarianship as a profession in Nigeria. for the integration call professionals and paraprofessionals is to ensure that LRCN achieves immediate and anticipated mandates as a regulatory agency, and elicit more financial commitment to the Council. Perhaps LRCN can solicit the support of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) as the mouth piece of librarians in the integration process so that LRCN can be at par with other regulatory professional bodies who have succeeded in doing so in Nigeria. It has been stated that the

Federal Government of Nigeria has already accorded equal status to librarianship with other professions with the inauguration of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (NLA cited in Adomi & Nwalo, 2003).

As a profession already accorded equal status with other profession by the Federal Government, it is incumbent on it to accord fair treatment to all professionally trained personnel (professionals and paraprofessionals) and granting them the registration status. The councils such as those of engineer, teachers, accountants, and laboratory scientists have successfully integrated membership through holistic their professional cadres and within their rank and file, they meet to deliberate on matters affecting membership, at other times attend classes to enable them write and pass certification examinations to attain higher ranks prescribed and recognized by their respective councils. This thrust can make LRCN benefit and achieve the following:

- a) a stable relationship among all the cadres within the library system;
- b) regulate unanimously LIS programmes in Nigeria and the structure so as to establish dictates who ascend to a position within its rank and file;
- c) establish and maintain a clear connection for the interconnection of professionals and paraprofessionals, as it enjoins them to, and interconnect with themselves,
- d) establish a platform that can continue to strengthen and improve relationships among the academics

- and practicing professionals within the same institution and beyond,
- e) set career paths, appointment and promotion of library personnel starting from the micro-level as it is stated in the LRCN statutes for professionals, and
- f) resolve the disparity in salary structure of members across the country

#### Conclusion

establishment The and eventual inauguration of LRCN has strengthened librarianship in Nigeria. In addition to being responsible for the regulation of practice, training and sanctioning, it has been able to distinguish, promote and make the recognition of the profession possible because of the way the library as an institution contributes immensely to the development of the society. The mandates of the LRCN affect emoluments, career path, roles and maintenance of discipline amongst

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Competition others. for space, recognition as a profession and the rising need for the inclusion of its personnel for registration, particularly the paraprofessionals, is imperative because they are a major segment of librarianship concerned with technical and operational levels in all libraries. They also form recognized nomenclatures in the rank and files of the profession. These rare characteristics possessed by paraprofessionals have informed the suggestion of the paper to the registration advocate for and integration of paraprofessionals into recognized cadres of the profession. This can follow a pyramidal structure to aspire paraprofessionals to become professionals. The suggestion emanates from a careful observation of the inclusion of such personnel by other agencies Nigeria regulatory in particularly, COREN and TRCN who are enjoying tremendous support.

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