

Assessment of Categories of Personnel in Private University Libraries in South East Nigeria Based on LRCN Minimum Standards and Guidelines

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Abstract

The success of the university libraries is greatly determined by the number of qualified staff available and the categorization of staff as per the regulatory standards. There have however been questions on just how far these libraries are complying with the minimum staffing regulations as required by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) especially in the South East where the growth of the private universities has not necessarily been accompanied by a corresponding growth in libraries. The research design adopted is a descriptive survey research design to develop a systematic system of data collection and data description of the private university libraries in South East Nigeria. The research is done on the 14 private universities in the area, through a census method. An observation checklist and structured interview guide based on Librarians standards of Registration Council of Nigeria are used to collect data. The results indicate that the number of staff in the libraries of the private universities in South East Nigeria differs with an average of 59% being the number of professionals librarians out of the total number of the staff, which is beyond the minimum requirement of Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) of 35%. The para-professionals and support staff however contributed to only 41 per cent as opposed to the recommended 65, which means that staff composition is not adhering to expectations. Even though the majority of professional librarians had the appropriate qualifications (primarily BLIS, Master, and PhD), the percentage of LRCN-certified ones was 37.

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1. Introduction

Evaluation of types of people working in the library of a private university is critical to the contribution of human resources to the successful provision of information services in the educational establishments. Libraries of private universities are usually made up of various types of personnel that play different, albeit complementary roles to attain the organizational goals. These personnel may be broadly grouped into professional librarians, para-professional staff and support staff, each of which plays a unique role in the operation of the library and quality of services.

The main group of personnel in the libraries of the privately funded universities is professional librarians. They are well trained professionals who are academically qualified in Library and Information Science who handle managerial, administrative and specialized information services. Recent research indicates that professional librarians can be strategic, including conducting collection development, providing reference services, teaching information literacy, and managing digital resources (Oguntayo et al., 2024). They have the competencies that greatly influence service delivery since they will be required to conform to the new technologies and user needs. Moreover, their workplace attitudes such as interpersonal relationship and service commitment have been identified to influence greatly library patronage in privately-owned universities (Michael & Olayemi, 2023). This emphasizes the need to evaluate their qualifications, but their performance and behavioral qualities as well.

Paralibrarians closely associate with professional librarians, and are commonly called library assistants or technicians. These staff members usually have diploma or undergraduate degrees in library studies and assist the efforts of professional librarians. Their duties involve cataloguing services, circulation services, shelving and user services. The studies show that the para-professionals are supportive but unnecessary to support the day-to-day running of the libraries and to remain accessible to the information resources (Donkor et al., 2024). The difference between the professional and para-professional role is significant in personnel assessment as the role

can be used to explain the job expectations, career growth and training requirements in the case of the private university libraries.

Other essential categories are support staff that comprises of clerical workers, ICT workers, security workers and cleaners. They might not be trained as a librarian, but their efforts are crucial to the effective operation of the library setting. As an example, ICT staff members assist with digital library, database management, and automation, which are becoming more and more central with contemporary academic libraries. Research on developing academic libraries points to the development of technological skills and infrastructure, the development of which largely relies on the performance of ICT-related staff (Iwuchukwu & Emuchay, 2023). Hence, support staff evaluation is done by evaluating their technical skills, dependability, and their teamwork with professional librarians.

Besides these major categories, private university libraries can also comprise of managerial staff like the university librarians, deputy librarians and departmental heads. They are the leaders, policy guides and strategists who are required to help in accomplishing the institutional objectives. Empowerment of staff and productivity has been found to be determined by leadership and organizational styles in academic libraries (Adekoya & Guobiazor, 2023). This means that to measure this category, we need to measure leadership effectiveness, decision making ability and the capability to create a positive working environment.

These types of personnel are usually evaluated with references to various criteria such as professional competence, job performance, job satisfaction and career development opportunities. Empirical research indicates that career management practices and training opportunities can go a long way to improve the performance of library personnel in the university setting (Omotunde et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of lifelong professional growth and development and capacity building among all types of staff. Moreover, being inclusive during decision-making (e.g., budgeting and collection development) has been identified to positively affect staff morale and institutional effectiveness (Bakrin & Liasu, 2023).

This research is informed by the growing demands of quality library services in the privately-owned universities of South East Nigeria and the necessity to streamline people structures with the required standards by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). Although other researchers have explored the issues of staff competencies, job performance, and service delivery in academic libraries, they tend to look at them at large without specifically questioning the adherence to LRCN minimum standards and guidelines (Oguntayo et al., 2024; Adekoya & Guobiazor, 2023). A similar research carried out in academic libraries highlighted the significance of professional competencies yet failed to classify staff members in accordance with the regulatory standards, thus creating a gap in systematic evaluation (Michael & Olayemi, 2023). In a similar manner, research on the staffing patterns in libraries has identified the importance of professional and para-professional staff, but they seldom assess how these groups align with the national regulatory standards (Omotunde et al., 2024).

The present work is thus innovative in its approach to evaluate personnel categories, when narrowed down to the application of the LRCN standards, offering a regulatory, but not general, descriptive appraisal. In this way, it fills the gap between policy expectations and real practice in staffing in libraries of private universities in South East Nigeria. It, therefore, attempts to respond to the question: What are the types of personnel who can be deployed to deliver effective and efficient services to users as mandated by the LRCN standards and guidelines within the context of South east in Nigeria, in the case of private university libraries?

2. Method

The research design used was a descriptive survey research in order to systematically gather and describe information about the nature and characteristics of the libraries at the universities which are privately owned in South East Nigeria. This design was deemed suitable since it addressed the current state of affairs and allowed the researcher to gain a holistic picture of the population by taking observations and interviewing them as Sirisilla and Sirisilla (2023) affirm. The research took place in South East geopolitical region of Nigeria, which is made up of Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States. The region was chosen because of the homogeneity of the culture, good focus on education and the swift increase in the number of the private universities, which was a good environment to study the library development and adherence to the regulatory norms.

The South East had over the years witnessed a tremendous growth in higher education especially in the setting up of the private universities. Such institutions were diverse in terms of organization, and resources as well as administrative capacity, providing a dynamic context of evaluation of the variation of library services, management practice and conforming to national standards established by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The region was also selected based on the institutional density of the region, its relative stability and the relevance in producing results that can be used at the regional and national level.

The study population was all the 14 privates universities in the South East and since the population was manageable, a census method was used and no sampling was done. Two primary data collection tools were used,

an observation checklist was named Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria Standard and Guidelines Implementation Assessment (LRCNSG) and a structured interview guide was named Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria Standard and Guidelines Interview Schedule (LRCNGIS). These tools were created according to the standards of LRCN, expert feedback, and insights of related literature. The observation checklist had 96 items that were grouped into four clusters that dealt with accommodation, furniture and equipment, information resources, and ICT facilities. The interview guide was designed in six groupings that covered the categories of staff, services, budgeting, ICT requirements, management and preservation practices.

The instruments were also face and content validated by experts in the fields of Library and Information Science and Measurement and Evaluation in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in order to ensure validity. Their comments were used to make the necessary changes and adjustments. The reliability was achieved by performing pilot test in one of the private universities outside the study area. Cohen Kappa was used to determine inter-rater reliability and an agreement of moderate to near perfection was obtained among the clusters. These findings were consistent with the benchmark scale suggested by Landis and Koch (1977) and the results indicated the consistency and reliability of the instruments.

The collection of data was conducted by direct visits to the university libraries, where the researcher would use the checklist to observe facilities, and the interview the university librarians. This would enable personal evaluation and engagement with respondents, and hence precision and comprehensive data collection. The evaluation was based on the LRCN manual to ensure that it is in line with the national standards. The analysis of data was done in percentages. The results of the interviews were tabulated in frequency tables with presentation based on research questions. The percentage distribution was used to determine the extent of compliance with LRCN standards. A decision rule was utilized such that a score of 70% and above would be considered as compliance and a score of less than 70% would be considered as non-compliance. This was an analytical method through which findings were easily interpreted and the extent of compliance with the set guidelines in the libraries of the private universities was evaluated.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Table 1 shows that the total number of library staff in the 15 private universities sampled ranged from 2 to 15. The proportion of professional librarians relative to the total library staff ranged from 33% to 100%. On average, 59% of the total library staff were professional librarians, exceeding the 35% threshold stipulated in the LRCN's standards and guidelines. In terms of para-professionals, only 5 (33%) out of the 15 university libraries employed para-professionals, while 12 (80%) had support staff. Combined, the percentage of para-professionals and support staff relative to the total library staff was 41%, which falls below the stipulated 65%. This indicates that private university libraries in the South-East do not fully comply with the LRCN's standards and guidelines regarding the composition of library staff.

Regarding qualifications, the majority (46) of the professional librarians held a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science (BLIS), followed by 24 with Master's degrees and 8 with PhDs. However, only 29 (37%) of the 78 professional librarians were certified by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). This suggests that while most professional librarians meet the requisite qualifications, the majority lack certification. Therefore, the universities only partially align with the LRCN's standards and guidelines regarding the qualifications of professional librarians. For the qualifications of para-professionals and support staff, 11 out of 14 para-professionals held diplomas, while 3 had B.Sc. degrees. Among the support staff, 21 out of 40 had WAEC certifications, and 14 held B.Sc. degrees. This partially aligns with the LRCN's standards and guidelines, which specify that para-professionals should possess diploma qualifications and support staff should have at least WAEC certificates.

Table 1. Distribution of Librarian Staff in Private University Libraries Based on Library Staffing in LRCN Standards and Guidelines

Uni	Total Library Staff	Professional Librarians N(%)*	Number of Para Prof.	Number of Support Staff	Number of Para-prof. & Support Staff N(%)**	Qualification of Professional Librarians	LRCN Registration By Professional Librarians N(%)	Qualification (Para-Prof.)	Qualification (Support staff)
1	12	4 (33)	3	5	8(67)	4 Master's	3(75)	3 HND/ OND	-
2	11	7(64)	Nil	4	4(36)	4 Master's, 3 BLIS	3(43)	-	4 WAEC
3	12	9(75)	2	1	3(25)	1 PhD 8 BLIS	5(56)	2 Diploma	1 WAEC
4	15	12(80)	Nil	3	3(20)	1 PhD, 1 Master's, 10 BLIS	4(33)	-	3 WAEC
5	10	8(80)	Nil	2	2(20)	3 MLIS, 5 BLIS	3(38)	-	2 WAEC
6	12	3(25)	2	7	9(75)	1 PhD, 2 Master's	2(67)	1 HND, 1 B.Sc.	7 WAEC
7	7	3(43)	Nil	4	4(57)	1PhD, 2 Master's	-	-	4 B.Sc.
8	4	3(75)	Nil	1	1(25)	3 MLIS	1(33)	-	1 B.Sc.
9	10	2(20)	5	3	8(80)	1 PhD, 1 BLIS	2(100)	5 HND	3 B.Sc.
10	12	12(100)	Nil	Nil	-	1 PhD, 3 Master's, 8 BLIS	4(33)	-	-
11	2	2(100)	Nil	Nil	-	1PhD, 1 BLIS	1(50)	-	-
12	3	1(33)	2	Nil	2(67)	1 BLIS	-	2 B.Sc.	-
13	4	2(50)	Nil	2	2(50)	2 BLIS	-	-	2 B.Sc.
14	11	7(64)	Nil	4	4(36)	1 PhD, 2.Master's, 4 BLIS	-	-	2 WAEC, 2 B.Sc.
15	7	3(43)	Nil	4	4(57)	1 PhD, 2 BLIS	1(33)	-	2 WAEC, 2 B.Sc.
	132	78(59)	14	40	54(41)	8 PhD 24 Masters, 46 BLIS	29(37)	11 Diploma 3 B.Sc.	21 WAEC 14 B.Sc.

3.2. Discussion

The Results of Research Question showed that the libraries of South-East Nigeria universities (which are privately owned) have different types of staffing necessary to provide effective service delivery as per the standards and guidelines of the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). The findings revealed a total workforce of between 2 and 15 library staff in the sampled universities with professional librarians comprising 59% of the workforce and this is higher than the LRCN recommended workforce of 35. This observation was consistent with the stance of Chukwuji, Tsafe, and Ejezie (2021) who noted that most libraries in Universities in Nigeria also have a relatively high ratio of professional librarians to maintain quality service delivery. However, contrary to this, Obiamalu and Echedom (2022) have found that there are discrepancies in staffing structures in university libraries in South-East Nigeria, with some institutions meeting the staffing standards, and others failing to do so because of institutional constraints.

The professional librarians dominance in the libraries studied indicates that there is an effort towards ensuring that the quality service is offered by the private universities. This observation is consistent with the overall viewpoint by Yasin (2025), who highlighted that proper staffing of the profession is a key to an efficient library management and advancement of literacy-related services. But, conversely, Adam (2017) observed that in most cases, despite the presence of professional staff, the quality of service can continue to be impaired by poor support systems, indicating that staffing is not the only factor that ensures the best service provision.

Additional breakdown revealed that 5 (33% of the libraries) had para-professionals, and 12 (80% of the libraries) support staff. The total percentage of para-professionals and support staff amounted to 41% that is lower than the LRCN level of 65%. This shows that there is a huge disproportion in staffing structure with the professionals librarians prevailing at the expense of other staff types. Obiamalu and Echedom (2022) observed the same in South-East Nigeria university libraries in which the support staff were not adequate thus influencing the efficiency of the operations. Conversely, Chukwuji et al. (2021) demonstrated a more equal staffing setup in the libraries of North-West universities, which indicates the differences in adherence to LRCN standards within the region.

Poor representation of para-professionals and support staff could also affect the way the libraries operate since both types of staff members are critical towards daily operations and technical services. This result correlates with the statements made by Barfi et al. (2023) who highlighted that efficient service provision in academic libraries would be only possible with the professional competence of the staff but a sufficient number of support staff to perform the operating duties. Equally, Kumar and Mahajan (2019) observed that the overall staffing structure, that is, both professional and non-professional, has an impact on the quality of library services. Conversely, some researchers like Gakibayo, Ikoja-Odongo and Okello-Obura (2013) pointed out that despite the limited staffing, libraries can still be effective in delivering their services due to efficient use of their resources although such a situation might not be sustainable in the long run.

Concerning qualifications, the results showed that most of the professional librarians had Bachelor's degrees in Library and Information Science (BLIS), then those with Master and less with PhDs. This was a similar finding with Akinola (2019), who indicated that the majority of librarians in Nigerian academic institutions have first degrees as a qualification to follow, with a smaller proportion of them progressing to postgraduate degrees. Similarly, Anjili and Echedom (2024) also established that the largest percentage of professional librarians in university libraries are BLIS holders, the minimum qualification to become a professional librarian.

Nevertheless, the number of professional librarians registered with the LRCN was only 37% even though they had qualified personnel. This shows a difference between the academic qualification and professional certification. The finding is also in agreement with Obiamalu and Echedom (2022), who also found low levels of LRCN registration among librarians in South-East Nigeria. Conversely, Chukwuji et al. (2021) realized more compliance with professional registration in North-West Nigeria, which implies that the awareness and implementation of LRCN standards in different regions might be different.

The poor degree of professional certification is a question of compliance with the norms of the regulations and professional ethics. This result is consistent with Nilsen (2020), who highlighted that to effectively implement standards, structural compliance needs to be accompanied by regulatory compliance. In a similar manner, Uzougbo, Ikegwu, and Adewusi (2024) observed that accountability and quality in institutional practices can only be achieved when they adhere to the set standards. Conversely, Farid, Warraich, and Iftikhar (2025) held the view that compliance is usually affected by institutional policies and management practices rather than by individual certification and hence organizational support plays a critical role in supporting professional registration.

As far as para-professional qualifications were concerned the results indicated that the majority of para-professionals had diploma qualifications with a few having B.Sc. degrees. This discovery was in line with the

LRCN standards, which propose diploma qualifications to the para-professional staff members. It also coincides with the results of Anjili and Echedom (2024) who found out that the most popular diploma qualification among para-professionals in Nigerian university libraries is the diploma. However, other works, like Basantes-Andrade et al. (2022) also indicated that the demands of professionalism in current information environments could demand higher qualifications even in support positions, meaning that the expectations are changing.

In the case of support staff, most of them had the WAEC certificates with the remaining having B.Sc. degrees. The results are in line with LRCN guidelines, which imply that support staff must possess at least basic education. In another study, Ezecheta (2022) established that basicly educated support staff is critical in supporting the daily operations of the library especially in the management of ICT equipment and user support services. On the same note, Fidelis (2018) highlighted the importance of the support staff in enabling innovative library services based on the use of ICT.

Nevertheless, the support staff with a higher level of qualifications including B.Sc. degrees is an indicator of possible underuse of human resources. Conversely, Sultan and Rafiq (2021) asserted that highly educated support personnel could promote service delivery through their contribution towards sophisticated library services, especially in digital and open access platforms. It means that the qualification structure is in compliance with LRCN standards, but there is a possibility to optimize the use of the human resources available.

The results reveal that the LRCN standards and guidelines are partially met with regard to the types of personnel and their qualifications. Although the percentage of professional librarians is above the necessary level, the lack of professional certification of para-professional and support staff, along with the low professional certification level of many of them, are indicators of concern. This result is in line with the more comprehensive assessment frameworks that Stufflebeam and Zhang (2017) consider, which place significant importance on thorough assessment as a way of determining the strengths and weaknesses of institutional practices. Moreover, the results are in line with the views of Levy-Feldman (2025) who observed that assessment is essential in enhancing performance of the institutions, and fair distribution of resources. In the same vein, OECD (2012) highlighted the importance of effective evaluation and assessment frameworks in enhancing the results in educational institutions, such as libraries.

4. Conclusion

The evaluation of the types of staffing in the libraries of South East African private universities indicates that, there is a moderate adherence to the requirements set by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). Although most of the libraries have a percentage of professional librarians that matches and even surpasses the recommended number, the ratio of the necessary number of para-professional and support staff is significantly below the mark. This imbalance has its implications on the effective service provision since all types of staffs are vital in the smooth running of contemporary academic libraries.

Also, despite the fact that a lot of the professional librarians have the required academic qualifications, low rate of LRCN certification also points to the lack of correlation between the requirements of the qualification and professional registration. This weakens the complete compliance to regulatory expectation and can impact on quality and standardization of library services. The results thus indicate that the private university libraries in the area are not entirely in line with the LRCN minimum standards and guidelines. Complete compliance will come at the costs of conscious efforts by the university management to make sure that it has the right staffing arrangements, promote professional qualification and reinforce compliance with national standards. These need to be improved to make the private university libraries in South East Nigeria more effective, credible and global competitive.

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Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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