TOWARDS PUBLIC LIBRARIES TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA: STAFF PATTERN APPROACH

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Abstract:

This paper x-rays the roles of staff pattern in the transformation of public libraries in Nigeria. The paper highlights that the responsibilities of the public library are still of huge proportions and therefore the public library should be treated, with regard to staff pattern, as one of the major government departments in the States of the Nigerian Federation. Government recognition of the public library as one of the foremost government departments should incorporate adoption of enhanced staff pattern, asserts the paper. Furthermore, the paper identifies effective recruitment, staff categorization and remuneration, correct placement, training and development, fair promotion, and organizational structure as the elements that constitute staff pattern which determine the status of public libraries in any nation. To achieve quality service delivery through the transformation of public libraries, the paper contends that the current staff pattern existing in the public library system in Nigeria need to be reviewed and enhanced. Also, to transform public libraries in Nigeria to higher status for quality service delivery, the paper made recommendations in the areas of: staff recruitment; restoration of academic status to librarians in the public library system; and harmonization of librarian cadre - all having implications on funding of public libraries in Nigeria.

Key Words
Public library; Staff pattern; Librarian competency; Librarian cadre; Promotion; Organizational structure.

Introduction:

In the context of this research paper, public library refers to the library established and funded by the government for the use of the people. A public library still remains a basic necessity in the modern world. It is an information centre; an educational institution; a social and cultural centre. For ages, the public library has been rightly described and hailed as 'the people's university'. It is the only place where all sections of a community – labourers, artisans, lawyers, teachers, students, doctors, patients, traders, princes and paupers – can find reading materials to meet their needs and reading tastes. It is also the only place where members of a family – father, mother, children, and grandchildren – can satisfy their needs for enlightenment and entertainment through the medium of books. The Public Library is still the one place which provides opportunities for self-education to one and all – men and women, urban and rural dwellers, the normal and even the abnormal. Its services are directed to cover every individual in the community – whether literate or not. It is the most democratic institution. It does not make any distinction among the several members of the community (Diakite, 2005). It reaches special classes of people such as the visually handicapped, the children and the illiterate adults. The public library takes responsibility to see that the literate adults do not relapse into illiteracy for waning interest in reading and want of reading material. It is the foundation from which the currents of self-education, intelligence, culture, enlightenment and intellectual entertainment flow into the community. It is a bee-hive of activities which go to enrich the life of the community. It is a fountain as well as a reservoir of knowledge (Dike, 2007).

It can be seen from the foregoing that there are tremendous responsibilities on the public libraries in a country like Nigeria. These responsibilities are not in any way inferior or less important when compared with the responsibilities of the other major departments of the government. On the contrary, the responsibilities of many major departments of the government are limited in scope when compared with the responsibilities of the public libraries.

Considering the ever growing relevance and innate responsibilities of public libraries in any society, it is expected that public libraries in Nigeria would continue to receive priority attention in government support, but the contrary is the case. Opara (2012) recalled that the period spanning from 1955 to 1980 was the golden era of public libraries in Nigeria because the public libraries within this period enjoyed tremendous support from the political leadership. Oyegade, Nassarawa and Mokogwu (2003), Opara (2008), and Nwegbu, Echezona and Okafor (2012) stressed that poor funding, which translates to government neglect, is the bane of public libraries in contemporary Nigeria. As a result, the status, that is, the prestige, the relative position or standing of public libraries in Nigerian society, is low. Furthermore, the public library status is low because the human and material resources of the library are in comatose. Osuigwe, Jiagbogu and Udeze (2012) are among the few who highlighted the need for higher qualification of librarians in the public library in Nigeria. The librarian's qualification, competence, etc are important factors in staff pattern because the library staff holds a pivotal position in the matter of providing effective services to the users of the library. As such, issues of competence of librarians (qualification and skill requirement), designation of library staff, and organizational structure of the library have immense effect on the provision of effective service to the users. A library having spacious building and adequate collection cannot render the best services to its users without efficient and qualified staff. The staff, the information resources and the users make up the fundamental trinity of a library. The success of a library largely depends upon the persons who are responsible for the effective use of a good collection of information resources in the hands of the users. A library having good collections cannot render the best services to its users without efficient and skilled personnel. The basic aim of the library staff should be to place the right book in the hands of the right readers at the right time. They should ensure that no reader who requires help either in the choice of documents or in getting information from documents should go without it. No library can run without manpower. Therefore, staff pattern is a major factor in the transformation of public libraries in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study:

For over two decades, the status of public libraries in Nigeria has progressively dwindled. To ameliorate this situation, librarians have, in most of their research writings, focused attention on improved funding of public libraries. A negligible attention has been given to the issue of staff pattern. Over the years, advocates of improved funding of public libraries have laid a lopsided emphasis on funding the material aspect of the library resources with less emphasis on funding the human aspect of the public library resources. This negligence of the human resources aspect of public libraries over the years is a major undoing of the public library system in Nigeria today. It should, however, be noted that funding is imbedded and implied in staff pattern. When issues of staff pattern are addressed, issues of funding are also largely addressed. Staff pattern is driven by adequate funding. It is an intelligent way of committing Government to improved funding. Staff pattern is concerned with staffing the library as an organization so that the public library can be effectively operated for the present and the future. One of the major challenges facing the public libraries is the constant exodus of librarians in the public library sector. Librarians in the public libraries in Nigeria often move to join the employment of the libraries in academic and research institutions for greener pastures. In this way, the public library inadvertently serves as a training ground for many young and up-coming librarians who, on gaining relevant experiences needed for better service provision, quickly leave the public library sector only to work and provide experienced services in the academic libraries and similar institutions. A new and better staff pattern has the potential to solve the problem of the librarians frequent job mobility in particular and some other problems facing the public libraries in Nigeria. Despite the great potential that staff pattern holds in the transformation of public libraries in Nigeria, not much has been written on it, and so, not much has been done about it. This implies that the neglect of staff pattern in the public library system in Nigeria is a major contributory factor to the current low status of public libraries. The purpose of this research paper, therefore, is to bring to fore the potentials of appropriate staff pattern in the transformation of the public library system in Nigeria. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of staff pattern in public library transformation and to advocate that greater attention be given to the issue of staff pattern in the public library system if the status of public libraries in Nigeria will be enhanced.

Components of Staff Pattern

The process of staff pattern comprises of the following major elements or components: (1) Effective recruitment; (2) staff categorization and remuneration; (3) correct placement; (4) appropriate training and development; (5) satisfactory and fair promotion; and (6) result oriented organizational structure. It is important that these components are explained:

Effective recruitment: Librarians, like teachers, have to deal with the mind. If the teachers deal with the mind of the living, the librarians have to deal not only with the minds of the living but also of authors of long ago, both living and dead. Books which the librarians have to deal with are living objects. On the shelves of the library are standing not inanimate objects but giant minds, great beings, and mighty men like Aristotle, Karl Max, Shakespeare, Mother Theresa, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, great religious and political leaders. The voices of these great minds still touch lives today from the pages of their books and books written on them. These mighty men, in the forms of their works and works on them, are still "living" and "standing" on the library shelves and impatiently waiting to inform, instruct, educate, enlighten, and entertain those who come to them. The librarians have, therefore, to act as catalytic agents between the readers on the one hand and the books on the other. They must have ability to divine the needs of the readers and the intentions of the authors and arrange for a match between the two. That is why recruitment of appropriate librarians or staff matter should really matter. The library has to be staffed by men and women who combine in themselves the brilliance of the mind with the warmth of the heart. The public library should be one of the major government departments/parastatals, and the State Librarian (chief executive officer) should be a librarian of higher status at par with heads of other top government parastatals. More harm than good would be done to the public library system by appointing people who do not possess the appropriate qualifications, competencies and experience. Instead of diluting the quality of the librarians in the public library system, minimum qualification requirements, competencies and experience should rather be raised.

In recruiting librarians for key positions in the public library, especially the position of a State Librarian (Chief Executive), proper evaluation should be made to ensure

the recruitment of qualified, experienced and competent professional. Librarians, by nature of their day-to-day work, are academics irrespective of the type of library that employed them. On the basis of their fundamental professional duties, librarians in the public library are as much academics as their counterparts in the university or other academic libraries. The fact that State Governments in Nigeria do not recognize and remunerate librarians in the public libraries as academic staff does not really remove the basic fact that they are indeed academics by the nature of their duties. As academics, librarians in the public library should be aware and ever conscious of the importance of research and relevant publications. These publications are indication of professional competence, freshness, and vigor. In recruiting librarians into high positions in the public library, evidence of research and publication should be one of the criteria in assessing the suitable candidates. Unlike the classroom teacher /lecturer, most librarians are heading the various sections, departments and units in the library with some library assistants and other categories of staff working under them. Therefore, librarians carry out administrative functions since they have personnel and materials directly under their control. That is the reason why administrative competence should be another criterion used in assessing a librarian for recruitment. Evidence of professional interest and evidence of interest in reading are also among the criteria that should be used for the librarian's assessment

Staff Categorization and Remuneration: Librarian's cadre refers to the categorization or ranking and remuneration of librarians as a professional group in a work place. All public libraries in Nigeria do not use exactly the same nomenclature in the librarian cadre. There is need for harmonization in the nomenclature used for the librarian cadre in all the public libraries in Nigeria. As stated earlier in this paper, librarians are all academics and should be designated and remunerated as academics. This paper, therefore, proposes that the nomenclature for the librarians in the public library be restructured to reflect their academic status and also retain their peculiarities. The adoption of the cadre or categorization for the librarians in the public library system is recommended as shown in the table below

Table showing recommended cadre for Public Libraries in Nigeria

S/N	Teaching Staff Cadre in Nigerian Universities	Librarian Cadre in most Nigerian Universities	Proposal for librarian's Cadre in the Public Library system in Nigeria
1	Graduate Assistant	Assistant librarian in training	Librarian II
2	Assistant Lecturer	Assistant Librarian	Librarian I
3	Lecturer II	Librarian II	Senior Librarian
4	Lecturer I	Librarian I	Principal Librarian
5	Senior Lecturer	Senior Librarian	Chief Librarian
6	Associate Professor	Deputy University Librarian	Deputy Director of Library Services
7	Professor	University Librarian	Director of Library Services
8	Vice Chancellor	Vice Chancellor	State Librarian

Adoption of the above proposal for the public library system in Nigeria implies that the conditions for appointment, promotion, and salary structure of the academic staff which includes librarians in the universities will also apply to the librarians in the public libraries. This will attract quality librarians to the public library system in Nigeria and so halt the exodus of librarians from the public library to the academic and research libraries. Indeed, the implication of adopting this proposal to the public library system is enormous. With high calibre and well motivated librarians in the public libraries, these librarians will be able to attract more government attention and more funding of the material resources of the public libraries. To achieve this, the public libraries should be placed in the tertiary education department of the ministry of education in all the States of the Nigerian Federation.

Correct Placement: This refers to the placement of staff in the appropriate cadre or category and salary grade. Librarians should be properly placed in the librarian's cadre or category based on their qualifications and competencies. This in turn determines the salary grade of the librarian.

Training and Development: The changing roles of the librarian determine the nature of information dynamics while the nature of information dynamics throws up new demands on the librarian's competencies. Ramos(2007) states that competence is a combination of skills, knowledge and behaviour patterns vital to organizational success, personal achievement, and career development. With new global environment for the library and information itself, the modern library is steadily moving from a paper based environment to a predominantly digital interface. This development has also produced a new wave of information seekers who need the expertise of the librarian in the analysis and interpretation of information with the aid of modern information technology. Therefore current demands on the librarian's competencies are discussed here under three headings identified in Ononogbo (2012) as follows:

ICT Competencies: Aman and Norllyana (2002) identified thirteen (13) Key ICT or IT competencies required for modern information services. They are: IT basics, word processing, electronic mail, internet and intranet, graphics, publishing, spreadsheet, project management, design, development and administration of data bases, systems maintenance and programming. Although it is a tall order for the librarian to acquire all the IT competencies, they are important skills for the librarian to fit into today's modern digital or hybrid library.

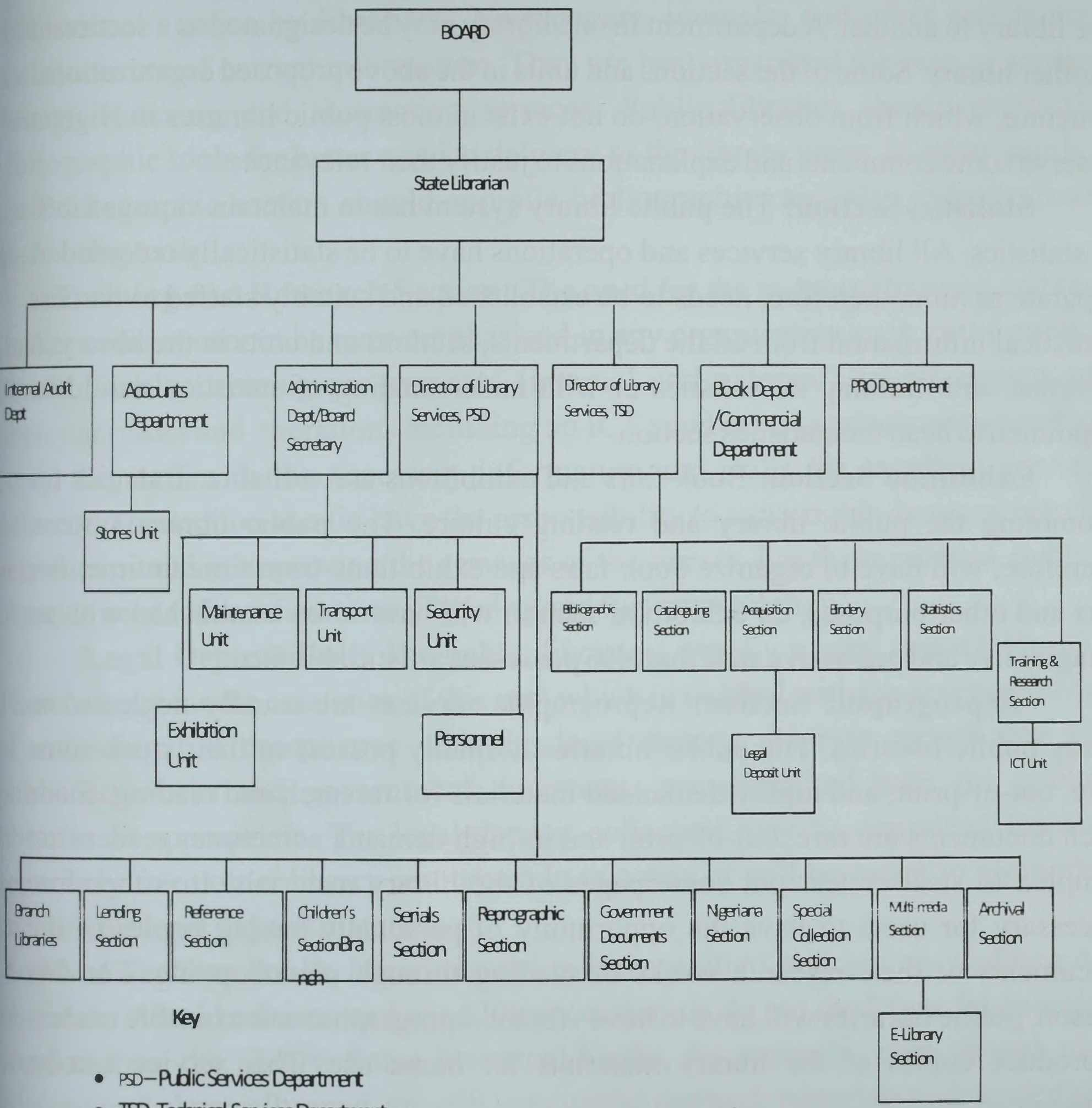
Professional Competencies: Although codes of competencies have been drawn by the Special Library Association (SLA) for their members, the codes should indeed be possessed by all librarians including the librarians in the public libraries in order to function excellently in today's modern libraries. Ononogbo (2012) also opined that all librarians must possess similar competencies in modern information age. According to St. Clair (2001) and Ramos (2007), the codes of competencies developed by the Special Libraries Association are that the librarian should:

- Have expert knowledge of the contents of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them;
- has specialized subject knowledge appropriate to the business of the organization or client;
- develop and manage convenient, accessible and cost effective information services that are aligned with the strategic direction of the funding body;
- provide excellent instruction and support for library and information service users;
- assess information needs, design and market value added information services and products to meet identified needs;
- Develop specialized information products for use by individual clients;
- evaluate the outcome of information use and conduct research related to the solution of information management problems;
- continually improve information services in response to changing needs;

Personal Competencies: Again, according to St. Clair (2001) and Ramos (2007), the personal competencies that were drawn for the special librarian need to be acquired by all librarians. The competencies are that the librarian should: be committed to service excellence; look for partnership and alliances; create an environment of mutual respect and trust; have effective communication skills; Work well with others in a team; provide leadership; and recognize the value of professional networking and solidarity

Fair Promotion: A promotion for the librarian is a professional growth, advancement in rank or position in the librarian's categorization system. Promotion may be a librarian's reward for good performance, that is, positive appraisal. Promotion of a librarian can involve advancement in terms of designation, salary and benefits, and in some organizations the type of job activities may change a great deal. Public libraries use the instrument of promotion to retain librarians of the highest quality (http://professor.rice.edu/professor/PROMOTION-TRANSFER.asp, n.d).

Organizational Structure: Public library organogram means the administrative structure put in place that drives the wheel of public library system. An administrative structure has the potential to enhance or retard the progress of any public library. The figure below is a proposal of an organizational structure for the public library system in Nigeria:



Key

- PSD – Public Services Department
- TSD-Technical Services Department

The adoption of the nomenclatures 'department' and 'sections' differ from one library to another. A department in one library may be designated as a section in another library. Some of the sections and units in the above proposed organizational structure, which from observation, do not exist in most public libraries in Nigeria deserve some comments and explanations to justify their relevance:

Statistics Section: The public library system has to maintain various kinds of statistics. All library services and operations have to be statistically recorded. A separate section, therefore, needs to be established and suitably staffed to harness statistical information from all the departments, sections and units in the library. A librarian with training in statistics or with understanding of statistics should be appointed to head the statistics section.

Exhibition Section: Book fairs and exhibitions are veritable strategies for promoting the public library and reading culture. The public library system, therefore, will have to organize book fairs and exhibitions from time to time. For this and other purposes, an exhibition section will have to be established with an imaginative and pro-active staff that also possesses artistic abilities.

Reprographic Section: Reprographic services are usually neglected in many public libraries. The public libraries normally possess in their stock some rare, out-of-print, and highly demanded materials for research and reading. Since such documents are rare, out-of-print and in-high demand, sometimes readers are tempted to steal or tear out some pages of the library materials. It is therefore necessary for users to have the opportunity of personally having copies of the documents of their research works or reading through photocopying. For this reason, public libraries will have to have vibrant reprographic unit to enable readers reproduce copies of the library materials for home use. This service can be outsourced.

Bindery Section: The public library will also have to have bindery of its own. Since library binding is very much different from commercial binding and since the public library system will have to acquire rare materials, back volumes of periodicals, government documents, etc which should not be sent out of the library for binding, having a separate Book Binding Section becomes a necessity.

Bibliographic Section: Indexing and abstracting services is an important professional service by librarians. Newspapers, journals, and other serials are useful sources of current information. They are best organized for ease of access through indexing and abstracting services. Public libraries should establish bibliographic tools for better service delivery to the library users. In other words, the Bibliographic section should compile bibliographies and also indexing and abstracting tools.

Training and Research Section: The need for the in-house training and refresher courses cannot be over-emphasized in any organization such as the public library. Sundry training programmes (internal and external) on all aspects of library services and operations including on ICT need to be regularly organized to equip the staff with the necessary information and skills for excellent service delivery. The section should have the responsibility to carry out in-house research activities aimed at improving the services of the library. For these reasons, public libraries need to have functional Training and Research Section.

Legal Deposit Unit: The public library is usually a legal deposit library. There is need for the existence of this unit which is saddled with the responsibility of enforcing full compliance with the legal deposit drive to ensure that all published works and government documents are deposited with the public libraries as appropriate. The legal deposit collection may be organized for use separately from other library resources. In this way, it will be easier to promptly account for legal deposit materials.

***Archival Section*:** Public libraries need to have written policies on wedding of materials. All old editions and aged library materials do not qualify to be entirely weeded from the library. Some historical books, for example, even though old editions and physically aged, are still very useful research materials and needed by the researchers. Such books may be weeded from the open access library shelves. But, because they are still needed by users, such books should find their places on the closed access library shelves in the archival section. The archival section and the presence of archival materials largely make a difference between public libraries and most other types of libraries.

***Multi-media Section*:** Multi-media or audio-visual materials still have its place in the public libraries. Musical/home videos, etc. should be seen as compliments to reading materials and not competitors to reading materials. They truly cannot take the place of reading in the life of an individual or a nation. Public libraries therefore need to carve out a section for multi-media materials and indeed provide them as veritable resource materials for information and entertainment in the library environment or for home use. Multi-media materials are used to harness vital information trapped in indigenous knowledge and also used to meet the information needs of the illiterate library users. Therefore, the multi-media section should be involved in the production of local content or repositories that are uploaded to the internet as part of the library's contribution to universal availability of information.

***Special Collection Section*:** Public libraries are noted for its services to all classes of people, including the physically handicapped such as the blind. Through the medium of the Braille book and the talking book, public libraries provide library services to the blind. Special collection section organizes special collections to meet the needs of the physically handicapped readers. The value of the special collections section in a public library cannot be over-emphasized.

Summary of Recommendations:

The application of the following recommendations will, to a large extent, transform public libraries in Nigeria:

(1) Qualified, experienced and capable professional librarians should be recruited in the public libraries in Nigeria.

(2) Librarians in the public libraries should be treated as academics in their recruitment, promotion and general conditions of service.

(3) To respond appropriately to the new wave of information seekers, librarians in the public libraries in Nigeria should regularly update their ICT, professional and personal competencies.

(4) Public libraries in Nigeria should adopt the same organizational structure as presented in this paper, but, with minor modifications to suit differing internal needs and situations.

(5) All public libraries in Nigeria should adopt the same nomenclature especially in the librarian's cadre as presented in this paper.

(6) Appropriate staff ratio as presented in this paper should be adopted in the public library system in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Public library managers can no longer afford to ignore the importance of staff pattern in the public libraries in Nigeria. The neglect of the unproductive staff pattern currently existing in the public libraries in Nigeria is a major handicap in public library development. Staff pattern is a management issue which should be given deserved attention for the transformation of the public libraries. The State Governments in Nigeria should provide the needed political support for the realization of a progressive shift in staff pattern as recommended in this paper. This will definitely transform the public library system in Nigeria. An awkward and demoralizing staff pattern as presently obtained in Nigerian public libraries can only continue to frustrate every other effort made to bring transformation and excellence of service delivery in the public libraries. In addition to political support, the State Governments should also provide the fund needed to implement and sustain a functional and progressive staff pattern as recommended. It is educationally suicidal for the State Governments in Nigeria to continue to downgrade an important agency of government such as the public library. To appropriately up-grade the public library, the staff pattern has to be up-graded accordingly as proposed in this paper.

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