

THE PLACE OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

BY

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Abstract

The paper looks at the place of the University Librarian in the administration of the university. It identifies the roles the Librarian should play and the relationships expected of him with key officers and organs so as to ensure that the library provides the required support aimed at achieving the desired mandate of the university. It is important for the Librarian to understand that due to the growing complexity and sophistication of the society, the university must similarly respond by producing the highest skilled manpower, lead the way in innovations, attract international talents and business investments, be an agent for social justice and mobility, offer partnership for social and cultural vitality, among others. It is the duty of the library to provide the university community with the information required to achieve these directions. The Librarian must therefore effectively coordinate the professional, administrative and academic activities of the library in terms of collection management, organization, preservation and dissemination of information resources and services, as well as strategic planning, budgeting, academic guidance and mentorship for the library to succeed in its mandate. Additionally, he must effectively play the secondary roles in the membership of statutory and ad-hoc committees, though not at the detriment of his primary constituency. In carrying out both the primary and secondary responsibilities, the librarian must relate well with key officers such as the Vice-Chancellor, fellow principal officers and other stakeholders, to attain the desired support for the library to be successful in attaining its mandate.

Key words: University, University Library, University Library Administration, University Librarian

Introduction

First and foremost, it is very important to have a clear understanding of certain key concepts, especially the university, which the library is meant to effectively support for the satisfactory accomplishment of its mandate. A university is the highest educational institution. It is the summit of education responsible for teaching, learning, research, and community service. For most of its existence up to the late 20th century, the university was thought of as an ivory tower where intellectuals were happily removed from the larger society to enable them engage in their mental and esoteric pursuits. While it is still true that the university is a place where intellectualism of the highest order flourishes as in the concept of the ivory tower, the town and gown have merged, thus affording intellectuals the opportunity to creatively respond to the dynamic needs of the society. This position was acknowledged by Boulton and Lucas (2011:4) who observed that:

Indeed, this flexibility and adaptability have become the hallmarks of universities. They are testimony both to a dynamic process of engagement in the pursuit and explanation of knowledge and to a sensitivity to the needs of the contemporary world and to the problems that preoccupy it. Universities operate in a complex set of mutually sustaining fronts - they research

into the most theoretical and intractable uncertainties of knowledge and yet do seek the practical application of discovery; they test, reinvigorate and carry forward the inherited knowledge of earlier generation; they seek to establish the sound principles of reasoning and action which they teach to generations of students.... universities are now regarded as crucial national assets. Governments worldwide see them as vital sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking, as providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials, as contributors to innovation, as attractors of international talent and business investment into a region, as agents of social justice and mobility, and as contributors to social and cultural vitality.

The views of Boulton and Lucas (2011) concerning what the modern university ought to be has been extensively quoted above to press home to librarians to appreciate the enormity of their expected roles in supporting their universities to achieve their mandates.

The university library is the unit of the university that is responsible for acquiring, processing, preserving and making available for use by members of the university community the items of information and knowledge that support their teaching, learning, research and community service. Since the university provides education of the highest level, the content of the library must meet this highest-level requirement.

The university library is seen as the heart of the university. Another view of it is being the life-blood of the university. In the view of Ifidon (1985:5), the university owes its existence and vitality to its library. The view is shared by Curzon and Skinner (2010:21) who averred that: "As the premiere support service to teaching, learning and research, libraries will continue to thrive and play an important role." It is expected that in response to the transformations in the universities, their libraries would also respond to these dynamics. Academic libraries, must of compulsion change in response to the changes in their parent institutions. The popularly held view is that the ranking of the university is a reflection of its library in terms of collections, staff and services. Thus, if the ranking is high, the library is rich and if the ranking is low, the library is poor. The university librarians are those with the professional knowledge of managing the library to ensure that it meets the dynamic needs of the university. The university library, and indeed the librarian, must change in response to the changes in the parent-institution. According to Moran and Leonard (2010:9): "In response to the transformation in the parent institutions, librarians will change also, and the...librarian of tomorrow may be as different from those of today as today's librarians are from those who tended the collections in the early universities." The keyword here is the ability to respond to the ever-changing role of the library which itself responds to the ever-dynamic place of the university in the society.

The Administrative Structure of Nigerian Universities

Figure 1 shows the typical administrative structure of Nigerian universities.

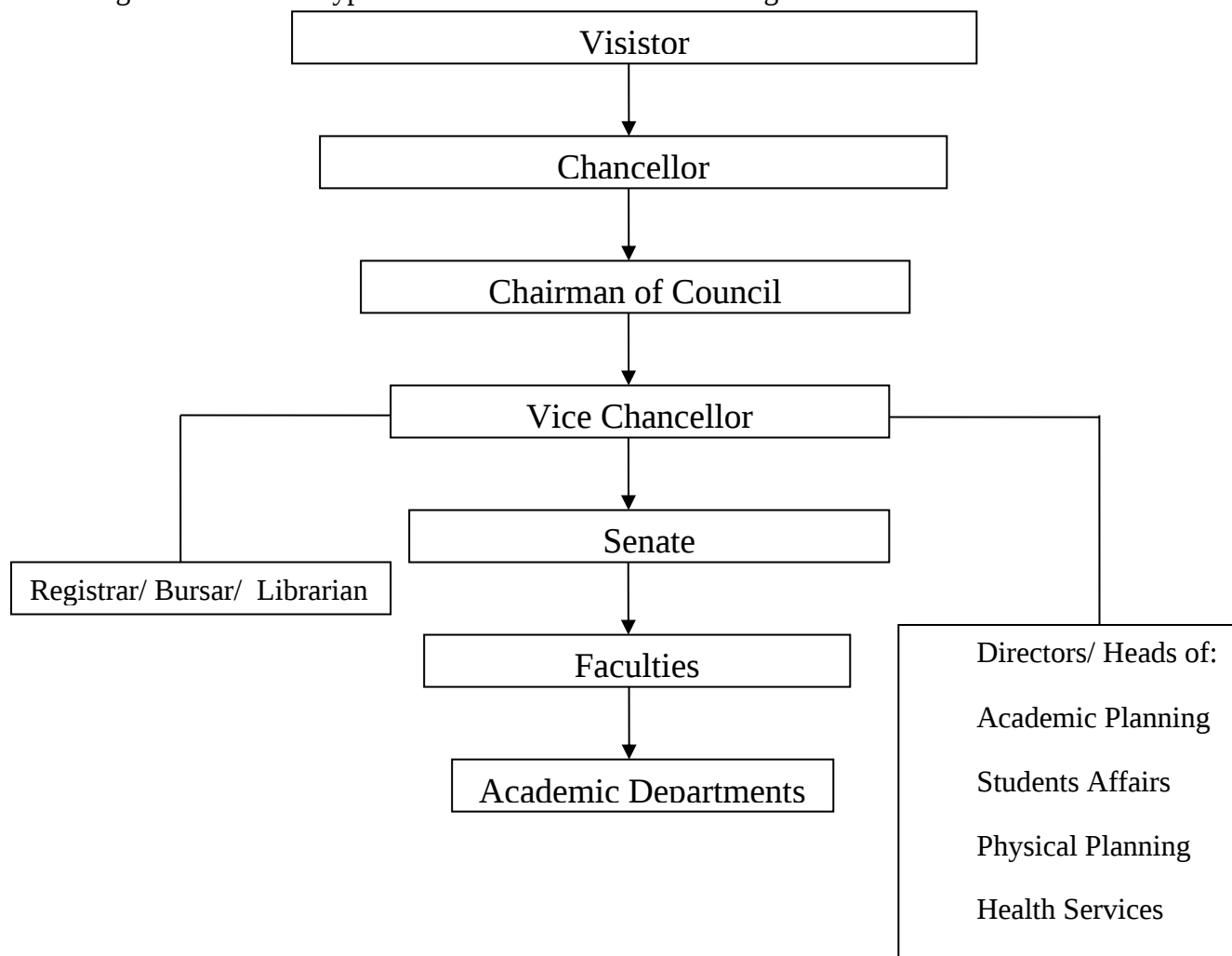


FIGURE 1: ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

The Visitor is the proprietor or the representative of the proprietor in the Nigerian contexts as it affects universities. At the federal government level, the President of Nigeria is the Visitor to all federal universities. At the state level, the Governor is the Visitor of the university or universities owned by each state. At the private ownership level, the Visitor is the head of the organization or the individual that owns the university. For example, Archbishop Augustine Akubueze, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) is the Visitor of Veritas University in Abuja. Bishop David Oyedepo, the founder of Living Faith Church is the Visitor to Covenant University, Abeokuta and Landmark University at Omu-Aran. Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar is the Visitor to American University of Nigeria, Yola. At the Al'Hikmah University, Illorin, the Visitor is referred to as the founder and he is Alh (Chief) Dr. Abdul-Raheem Amoo Oladimeji, Jagunmolu of Igbominaland. The Reverend (Dr.) Stephen Panya-Baba, the President of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) is the Visitor to Bingham University, Karu.

In Nigeria, the Chancellor is a ceremonial head, and in most instances, it is usually a traditional ruler or a person of influence that is appointed Chancellor. For example, the current Chancellor

of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Achebe, CFR, MNI. The Chancellor of Benue State University is HRH, Justice (Dr.) Lawal Gumi (Rtd), OFR, Sarakin Marafa Gumi; the Chancellor of Veritas University, Abuja is Most Reverend Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja; the Chancellor of Bingham University, Karu is HRH Luka Panya-Baba, Etsu Karu; and the Chancellor of Igbinedion University is Sir Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion, the Esama of Benin Kingdom, who also doubles as the Visitor. The Governing Councils of Nigerian Universities are responsible for decision-making at the highest level, with regards to their administration in terms of finances and other assets, appointments and promotions, etc. According to the University of Ibadan (2020).

The Council is the supreme governing authority of the university responsible for those policy decisions which have financial implications, the general management of the affairs of the University, and, in particular, the control of the property and expenditure of the University. The Council has powers to do anything, which in its opinion, is calculated to facilitate the carrying-on of the activities of the University including the regulation of the constitution and conduct of the University.

In federal and state universities, the councils constitute both internal and external members. The external members are political appointees while the internal members represent Senate, Congregation, Convocation and Alumni Associations. The Pro-Chancellor is the Chairman of Council, and the other members are, apart from those mentioned above, the Vice-Chancellor and his Deputies. The Registrar is the Secretary to Council and other Principal Officers are merely in attendance. There is hardly any Nigerian university where the Librarian is a member of Council with such provision in its statute. Bringing the Librarian and Bursar to Council meetings is usually at the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor with the approval of the Council. As members in attendance at Council meetings, Librarians may be made members of some or all of the Council statutory and ad hoc committees. Some of the statutory committees of the Council are:

- i) Finance and General Purposes Committee
- ii) Appointments and Promotions Committee
- iii) University Tenders Board
- iv) Staff Disciplinary Committee
- v) Budget Monitoring Committee
- vi) Security Committee

The Librarian as a member of Senate, Congregation, Convocation and possibly Alumni Association can make membership of Council through these bodies by election.

The Senate has the sole authority on all academic matters. It has the responsibility for setting up academic programmes, their organization, and implementation, up to the award of academic and professional qualifications. According to the University of Ibadan (2020), the Senate is responsible for:

the formulation of academic policies, including the organization and control of all academic activities of the university is the responsibility of the senate. The Senate is the coordinating body for recommendations from the various faculties and departments.

The Vice-Chancellor is the Chairman of Senate and the other members are the Librarian, Deans, Heads of Department, Professors, etc.

Some of the committees of the Senate are:

- i) Committee of Provosts, Deans and Directors

- ii) Finance and Research Grants Committee
- iii) Library Committee
- iv) Postgraduate Board
- v) Admission Committee
- vi) Students Disciplinary Committee
- vii) Senate Business Committee
- viii) Ceremonies Committee
- ix) Students Welfare Committee
- x) Inaugural and Public Lectures Committee

As an important member of Senate, the University Librarian can be a member of most of the committees of the Senate and may even be appointed to chair some of them.

Each Faculty has a Faculty Board, which has the responsibility for the governance of the former. The Faculty Board controls and regulates the academic programmes of each Faculty with the Senate as the final approving body. The Senate devolves a lot of its responsibilities to the Faculty Board so that it is not overwhelmed by them. The Senate thus serves as a clearing house.

The Chairman of the Faculty Board is the Dean, with the Librarian and all the academic staff of the faculty as members. The Librarian is usually represented in the respective faculty boards. The Departments are the feeder units for the faculties and they play the most basic, but very important academic roles. It is the responsibility of the library to support the academic, aesthetic and other roles of all the departments of the university.

The Duties of a University Librarian

The University of Abuja Act (U2-17) provides that:

The University Librarian shall be responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the administration of the University Library and co-ordination of the library services in the University and its campuses, colleges, faculties, schools, departments, institutes and other teaching or research units.

In carrying out the above responsibilities, which are enormous, the Librarian is expected to, among other things:

- i) coordinate all facets of university library services, such as collection management, organization, preservation and dissemination of information that best support the learning, teaching, research and community service needs of the members of the university community.
- ii) provide professional and academic guidance, in addition to the required direction to the library to support teaching, learning, research and community service roles of the university.
- iii) evolve, manage, implement and communicate the library's short, medium and long-term plans, which should align with those of the parent body.
- iv) prepare and implement the university library's annual budget.
- v) initiate, monitor and implement the library's administrative processes towards achieving the overall aims of the university.
- vi) evolve, promote and implement a culture of excellence, collaboration, innovation and sustained improvement in library services.
- vii) work constructively and conscientiously as a team member with other major stakeholders within the university to deliver effective library services to all deserving users.

- viii) serve as the leading scholar and administrator, in other words, the mentor in terms of provision of professional, scholarly, ethical, social and cultural guidance to the library staff, and indeed, entire members of the university community.

The above could be said to be the core responsibilities of the University Librarian, which in themselves are already enormous. There are, however, other responsibilities, which the Vice-Chancellor, in his judgement of the Librarian can assign to him or her. After all, in the advertisement for the position of the University Librarian, it is stated that apart from his primary duties, the Vice-Chancellor is at liberty to assign him other duties from time to time. The Librarian may make membership and even chairmanship of statutory committees of Council, Senate and Management. Some of these committees are:

- i) Admissions Committee
- ii) Junior and Senior Staff Interview Panels
- iii) Ceremonies Committee
- iv) Inaugural and Public Lectures Committee
- v) Finance and General Purposes Committee
- vi) Appointments and Promotions Committee
- vii) University Tenders' Board
- viii) Staff Disciplinary Committee
- ix) Budget Monitoring Committee
- x) Security Committee
- xi) Adhoc Committees such as Shop and Space Allocation Committee, Investigative Committees, etc.

In carrying out his primary and secondary roles in the university, the Librarian is expected to maintain a good relationship with the other officers of the university he works with. He should not carry out the secondary duties to the neglect of the primary duties.

The Librarian's Relationship with Other Key Officers of the University

The relationship of the University Librarian with other key officers of the university should be as follows:

- i) **The Chancellor:** The Librarian's interaction with the Chancellor should only be when the latter is carrying out his official functions during his visits to the University during convocation ceremonies or when the university management pays official visits to the Chancellor. The relationship should not go beyond the Librarian paying the Chancellor compliments, and possibly when the Chancellor requires an explanation on something, which the Vice-Chancellor feels the Librarian can provide, he may be so requested to provide the explanation.
- ii) **The Pro-Chancellor:** The Librarian will have the opportunity to meet with the Pro-Chancellor during the meetings of the Governing Council if he is a member in attendance. This is, however, not to be exploited by the Librarian to forge too close a relationship with the Pro-Chancellor, which the Vice-Chancellor may find uncomfortable.

The Librarian's interaction with the Pro-Chancellor should, therefore, be strictly official. There are certain times, however, that the Pro-Chancellor may invite the Librarian to find out about certain things with regards to the library, to which the Librarian would have to provide explanations. The Librarian should, however, avoid the temptation of discussing the Vice-Chancellor with the Pro-Chancellor unless it is for the overall interest of the system. He should, therefore, avoid doing anything that would arouse the suspicion of the Vice-Chancellor.

- iii) **The Vice-Chancellor:** The relationship of the Librarian with the Vice-Chancellor is that of absolute loyalty, trust and confidence. He should support the Vice-Chancellor 100% to achieve his mandate of developing the university, and in turn earn the Vice-Chancellor's support in developing the library.

The only exception is when the interest of the Vice-Chancellor goes counter to that of the system. In a situation like this, the Librarian should take a position that is for the overall interest of the system. This position should be made known in such fora as the Management meetings, Senate meetings, etc. The Librarian must resist the temptation to make this look like personal disagreement by refusing to talk on his position with individuals and groups. Taking a principled position against the unethical practices of a Vice-Chancellor may be at a huge personal and official costs to both the Librarian and the Library, but he must persevere because in the end he would be vindicated.

There are situations that individuals and groups may want to conscript the Librarian to join in their fight against the Vice-Chancellor. He must resist such invitations.

There must be mutual trust between the Vice-Chancellor and the Librarian, who should always protect the official interest of the former if they are for the good of the system.

- iv) **The Other Principal Officers:** The relationship of the Librarian with the other principal officers of the university should be that of mutual trust and respect for the officers who are operating at co-ordinate level. This relationship should be used to the overall advantage and interest of the library. A situation where the librarian will compromise the interest of the library and / or the integrity of the position of the University Librarian in order to gain personal favour from the other principal officers must never be allowed.
- v) **Directors and Other Senior Officers:** In relating with the Director and other Senior and Junior Officers of the university, the Librarian should do it with the realization that he is dealing with subordinates, who literarily deserve his respect and trust. He must, however, under no circumstances compromise the interest of the library and the sanctity of the office of the University Librarian in dealing with them.
- vi) **The Staff Unions:** The Librarian should support the activities of the Staff Unions that are for the overall interest of the university and their members. He must never be antagonistic to their genuine causes.
- vii) **The Students' Union:** The Librarian should support the activities of the Students' Union that are for the overall interest of students and that of the entire university. He must not be antagonistic to their genuine causes.

Conclusion

The societal expectation of the role of the university has grown in complexity and sophistication because of the equally ever-growing complexity and sophistication of the society itself, which the university must respond to. Universities are not only seen as important national assets for new knowledge and thinking, but must go a step further to be producers and suppliers of the most skilled manpower, a home to innovators and the leading pullers of international talents and business investments, as well as agents of social justice and mobility, in addition to being partners to social and cultural vitality.

The library has always been an important and active support organ in facilitating the realization of the university's mandate, and must, therefore, provide the required information services for

its realization of this ever-growing mandates. The Librarian, therefore, is faced with the challenges of meeting the expectations of the parent institution with regard to the role the library should play, which is very important, to say the least. Apart from his primary roles, which are mainly professional, that the librarian should ensure are satisfactorily carried out, he is expected to play certain secondary roles, which the Vice-Chancellor or the University Management devolves on him from time to time because of his position as a Principal Officer and an important member of management.

In fulfilling the secondary roles, which include membership or chairmanship of some statutory and ad-hoc committees, the librarian must ensure that his primary roles, nay constituency, i.e. the library must not be neglected. He is also expected to relate harmoniously with all the segments of the university in order to have the required support for the library to successfully accomplish its goals.

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