



# Torn Between Two Worlds: Perceptions of the Role, Status, and Career Progression of Librarians Working in University Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

Librarians working in university libraries are torn between the two dominant categories (academic and professional) of university staff. Belonging to either of the categories of staff has implications for the employees' roles and duties, status, and career progression in the academic setting. This study sought to understand the perception of librarians' roles, status, and career progression with the changing frontiers of knowledge and education in contemporary times. Using the qualitative approach, fourteen (14) librarians working in seven university libraries in Ghana were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. These librarians were purposively selected because they possessed the qualifications of practice and were experienced in the academic library setting. The data collected from the interview was transcribed. Using Nvivo software version 14, the researchers used the Reflexive Thematic Analysis method to garner codes and themes from the data to understand the phenomenon under study. The findings from the study showed that librarians perceived their roles and responsibilities of academic librarians to be classified into three dominant categories: research support, teaching, and managerial/administrative roles. Again, academic librarians were assigned to either the academic or professional cadre in their universities based on the university's understanding of the library as a professional or academic unit irrespective of the Librarian's qualification, roles and responsibilities and the changing academic librarianship landscape. The study revealed the challenges librarians working in academic libraries face with their promotion and career progression, including long years of waiting (6 years) to qualify for the promotion, role inconsistencies, stagnation/lack of promotion, the presence of an unclear career path, and the inability to meet promotion requirements due to the lack of time for research, all of which have implications on their job satisfaction leading to demotivation and stress among academic librarians. The findings of this study have practical implications for policymakers in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and researchers to understand the perception of the roles, status, and career progression of the librarians working in academic libraries in Ghana and to inform policy decisions.

## Introduction

The library is an essential component for the successful implementation of the mission and vision of any university. The university library, also known as an academic library, is mandated to collect, organise, store, preserve, retrieve, and disseminate information resources in line with the courses taught at the university (Appiah et al., 2016; Asimah, 2023). The university library is also responsible for creating and maintaining a conducive learning environment for its user

community. The librarians who work in these libraries are responsible for carrying out the responsibilities of the academic library (Afrane et al., 2022). Two categories of librarians work in university libraries to achieve their mandate. These are the professional and para-professional librarians. A librarian with a postgraduate degree in Information Science/Librarianship is considered a professional librarian and referred to as a 'librarian.' Such a librarian has gone through the rudiments of the profession, has good knowledge of information provision procedures, ethical use of information, the ethics of the practice of librarianship, and

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performs a managerial role in the library (Anwar & Warraich, 2013; Salaam & Onifade, 2009). This study focuses on the role, status, and career progression of professional librarians working in university libraries. In contrast, a para-professional librarian holds a first degree or diploma in librarianship and is generally referred to as a 'library assistant' who performs a supportive role in the library.

Generally, a library established in a university is known as an 'academic library' and the professional librarians who work in it are referred to as 'academic librarians' (Vrkic, 2019). In Ghana, however, most public universities align their librarians along the two Senior Member categories of their university staff, i.e., academic or professional, depending on their understanding and categorization of the library as an academic unit. The academic staff category comprises faculty members and staff employed to perform teaching and research duties, whereas professional staff primarily performs administrative and professional responsibilities. Hence, while some universities consider their libraries as academic units and consider their librarians as 'academic staff' under the academic cadre, with titles such as 'librarian (academic),' others consider their librarians as professionals aligned with the professional cadre, with titles such as 'librarian (professional)' and each category having laid down rules and criteria for their recruitment and progression.

Again, studies (Aby, 2011; Ajidahun, 2020) reveal a dominance in the requirements of an MPhil and Doctoral Degree in Information Science/Librarianship in the recruitment and progression of librarians working in university libraries. This is to compensate for the demands of the changing frontiers of knowledge and research and, in recent times, to satisfy the institution's expectations of professional librarians to contribute their expertise to achieve their mission and vision.

While the practice of academic librarianship, the role, and demands of the academic Librarian worldwide are evolving following the changing frontiers and demands of education, the status, career progression, and identity of librarians working in academic universities in Ghana have not changed to reflect their changing roles, qualifications, status, and identity of academic librarians in recent times. There is also no uniformity in the placement of librarians along the professional and academic cadre in Ghanaian public universities and the criteria for their recruitment and progression. Due to the pivotal role academic librarians play in enhancing teaching, learning, and research in universities, this study sought to ascertain the perceptions of academic librarians concerning their roles and responsibilities, status, and career progression and its implications on job satisfaction (Dzogbede & Asimah, 2020; Strothmann & Ohler, 2011) and the challenges they encounter.

### Problem statement

Although academic librarians are mandated to obtain the requisite educational qualifications, build their collection, and maintain their libraries satisfactorily to meet the changing demands of teaching, learning, research, and accreditation, these librarians are left in the gap (Opoku, 2013), hovering along the professional and academic cadre in their universities. As an accreditation requirement by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) for the commencement, continuity, and authentication of the certificates issued by tertiary institutions in Ghana, these institutions must have a library stocked with relevant materials to support teaching, learning, and research, managed by a professional librarian with a minimum of an MPhil degree in Information Science/Librarianship (Boshoff & Lampitey, 2020; Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), 2019), commensurate with the minimum qualification for teaching/academic faculty.

In pursuit of the minimum qualification, an MPhil degree in Information Science/Librarianship to be employed as a librarian in academic institutions, which is equivalent to the minimum qualification of a classroom lecturer, librarians working in some public universities are loosely referred to as 'academic' librarians and placed in either of the two staff categories. While some universities consider the library as an

academic unit or faculty and its professional librarians placed under the academic cadre, others view it as a professional/administrative unit and place its professional librarians under the professional cadre. These librarians are made to progress along the path where their libraries have been aligned, leaving an unclear path, misunderstanding, and perception of their role, status, promotion, and career progression (Opoku, 2013). Staff placement (academic or professional) has implications for their status, career progression, and emoluments. There is no uniformity in universities placing these 'academic' librarians in the two staff categories (academic or professional/administrative) (Opoku, 2012). This study sought to understand the perception of librarians who work in university libraries concerning their role, status, and staff placement and its implication on their promotion, career progression, and job satisfaction.

### Objectives

The following objectives guided the study to understand the perception of the roles, status, and career progression of professional librarians working in university libraries in Ghana:

1. To explore the roles and responsibilities assigned to librarians who work in university libraries
2. To understand the status, promotion, and career progression of these librarians and their implications on job satisfaction
3. To identify the challenges librarians face in their promotion and career progression in university libraries.

To achieve the stated objectives, this study aimed to respond to the following research questions:

1. What roles and responsibilities are assigned to librarians who work in university libraries?
2. What are these librarians' status, promotion, and career progression, and their implications on job satisfaction?
3. What challenges do librarians face with their promotion and career progression in university libraries?

### Literature review

#### *The role and responsibilities of librarians in universities*

Libraries established within institutions of higher learning are referred to as academic libraries (Nyarko et al., 2016). These libraries are mandated to collect, organise, preserve, retrieve, and disseminate information relevant to the courses taught in the institutions. Academic libraries tie their mandate and vision to that of their parent institution: to train and equip the human resource capacity for nation-building and the earth's sustenance. In the early days, the Librarian was in the middle of information sources and the library users, and they acted as intermediaries. However, the Librarian's role has evolved in the digital age to meet the changing needs of users (Nakitare et al., 2020).

To make relevant information readily available to the university community, academic libraries and their librarians constantly adapt their roles (Salaam & Onifade, 2009) to the changing frontiers of knowledge, interdisciplinary studies, and developments in research. Implementing emerging technologies, these librarians support the changing needs and demands of university students, staff, and faculty (Adu et al., 2016; Salaam & Onifade, 2009) and the expansion of university courses. The preservation of the closely held print collections housed in these libraries has evolved to include electronic resources to satisfy the demands of the technologically savvy millennial (Ali & King, 2015; Yamson et al., 2018). In recent times, academic librarians have been expected to be experts in selecting and making relevant materials available to faculty, students, and alumni through their subject librarianship roles, expanding their research knowledge and teaching others information literacies (Zai, 2015).

Technology is a predominant driver of change in academic libraries and the roles of academic librarians (Adu et al., 2016; Harris, 2016). This came with a new set of roles and responsibilities for librarians, whose role had to change from an intermediary to an 'apomediary' (the person providing support services) (Nakitare et al., 2020). Since the availability of computers, academic libraries have continued adapting their resources and services in consonance with technological advances (Obegi & Nyarnboga, 2011; Onyancha, 2018). To make information resources widely available to users, academic libraries have moved from using the card catalogue to using the online public access catalogue to developing union catalogues among sister universities to support information and document sharing through interlibrary loans and consortia building.

The identity, reputation, status, and ranking of institutions of higher learning are greatly influenced by the types of resources in their library and how easily and creatively these materials and resources are made available for the benefit of its user community for teaching, learning, and research (C. Ajidahun, 2021; Association of College and Research Library, 2010; Dimzov et al., 2021; Owusu-Ansah et al., 2023). To this end, academic libraries provide formal and informal instruction to students, staff, and faculty on using library software, research output, electronic and print information sources, equipment, finding aids, and guidance in information and literature searching (Tenopir et al., 2013; Thomas, 2011).

Also, academic libraries and librarians have improved their capacity and incorporated virtual reference services to support the proliferation of online learning and distance education. Through virtual reference services, academic libraries provide services to their users around the globe using text messages, telephone calls, emails, and online chat services to support their academics in their scholarly endeavours (Donkor & Ampadu, 2023; Godfrey, 2008). These libraries create and maintain a conducive and welcoming learning environment. Studies reveal that stack areas where books are shelved have been reorganised (Afrane et al., 2022) to create more reading and collaborative spaces. Librarians have transformed their library spaces by incorporating information/knowledge commons, lounges, meetings, conference and discussion rooms, multi-media rooms, and maker spaces to meet users' space needs and increase patronage (Nwagwu & Matobako, 2021).

#### *Status of librarians in university libraries*

Librarians working in university libraries are assigned either a professional or an academic status based on the library's alignment with the professional or academic cadre. Progression along the professional or academic status has requirements such as qualification, research and publication, and years of experience (Galbraith et al., 2016). Status is linked to identity, rank, and position and is considered a prestige, greatly influencing situations such as obtaining an academic appointment or giving tenure to academic librarians (Freedman, 2014; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Pierson et al., 2019). There is a wealth of literature on the academic Librarian's academic status, with most critics strongly supporting and others opposing it (Antwi, 1993; Galbraith et al., 2016; Hosburgh, 2011; Opoku, 2012; Silva et al., 2017; Walters, 2016; Wyss, 2010).

Recounting the evolution of university education in Ghana, Antwi (1993) explained the concept of status and the parameters of academic librarianship. The study revealed the lack of consensus on the status of librarians working in universities in Ghana and recommended the need to improve the status of librarians in Ghana. Similarly, Opoku (2012) highlighted the gradual shift of librarians at the University of Ghana to academic status. His study found that there was pressure on the librarians to upgrade to academic status and the implications of the academic status on research publication and job satisfaction of these librarians. Galbraith et al. (2016) measured the opinion of ARL librarians concerning the benefits and advantages of faculty status in academic librarianship.

Furthermore, Silva et al. (2017) explored how time and experience

affect an academic librarian's perception of tenure. They found that tenured librarians rated tenure as more beneficial than librarians without tenure with more than six years of work experience in their institutions. Meanwhile, Hosburgh (2011) looked at faculty status as a continuum for librarians rather than a dichotomy, a matter of degree rather than a simple 'yes' or 'no.' Hosburgh's study was to assist new academic librarians in making the right decisions in their careers as professionals and clarify the definition of faculty status for the profession at large.

In these changing technological and educational times, the calibre of staff who work in these libraries, especially at the managerial level, has changed. Most universities requiring MPhils for the position of Assistant Librarian; a former M.A. required position and a Ph.D. in Information Science/Librarianship for the position of Librarian. Librarians who work in university libraries are also expected to engage in continuous professional development programmes to be up-to-date with current trends in librarianship and information services provision.

A dichotomy, however, exists in the status and ranking of librarians in university libraries. A study by Opoku (2012) revealed that academic librarians in some universities in Ghana had the opportunity to choose not to have faculty/academic rank but to maintain the default professional rank. Hence, librarians working in academic libraries were allowed to choose to belong to either group (the professorial/academic group, which is the default group, or the professional/administrative group).

Again, to provide the needed information provision support brought forth by the changing frontiers of knowledge, the diversification of research, and the changing needs of students, institutions of higher learning are demanding research-based postgraduate degrees such as MPhil and Doctoral degrees in Information Science from librarians who work in university libraries (Salaam & Onifade, 2009). However, MPhil and Ph.D. degrees were requirements for faculty employment in universities in Ghana; these universities believe that the rigor and research exposure gained through MPhil and Ph.D. studies will equip librarians to provide better support for their faculty and students' research needs. Undoubtedly, librarians research to make quality and authentic information readily available for teaching, learning, and research in their university community and for their professional advancement (Boshoff & Lamprey, 2020; Opoku, 2012). However, these librarians are not considered academic staff in some universities in Ghana.

Studies have shown that although librarians perform their professional duties alongside their teaching and research functions, they lack cohesiveness when identifying their professional identities and roles, ranging from seeing themselves as academic support to seeing themselves as practitioners of a specific academic subject (Prucha, 2021). Wyss (2010) indicates that librarians' faculty status has yet to be compensated equally as their counterpart teaching faculty, with only 53.3 % of such librarians given academic year contracts.

Panda (2014) believes that these academic librarians blend the "academic world" and the "world of practice" of librarianship, bridging the gaps between the LIS world of practice and Academia. While Panda (2014, p. 142) refers to academic librarians as pracademics, name them "practitioner-researchers." These scholars advocate that this new generation of academic librarians should be identified, recognized, and supported to benefit their educational institutions.

#### *Progression/promotion of academic librarians in university libraries*

Status goes hand in hand with responsibilities, progression, and promotion. Academic librarians progress along the universities' two staff divisions (academic and professional). Academic librarians with "professional status" progress on the professional track, while academic librarians with 'academic status' progress on the academic rank. Among the public universities in Ghana, the requirements for the progression of librarians on the academic track are the same as those of their counterpart teaching faculty. These librarians are mandated to submit an equal number of research exhibits in addition to their professional

librarianship duties, which are considered their teaching component for their promotion. Professional librarians with “professional status” progressing on the professional track, on the other hand, are expected to submit exhibits analogous to the professional track and are not mandated to submit research exhibits.

Due to the demands required for the progression of librarians, studies (Hosburgh, 2011; Opoku, 2013) reveal that some universities leave their librarians to decide their progression path at the point of entry. In Ghana, while the choice of the status, i.e., academic or professional, is left at the discretion of some universities, other universities align their librarians to academic or professional based on their established policies. In the United States, 52 % of academic librarians are assigned nominal “academic status” with their ranking nomenclature from outlines the ranking nomenclature for librarians with academic status as Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor to align with the ranking of academic faculty (Opoku, 2013; Walters, 2016).

Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach to collect and understand the perceptions of academic librarians regarding their role, status, and career progression. A preliminary document analysis of the statutes and fundamental laws governing some public universities in Ghana was conducted to uncover the meanings, descriptions, and roles enshrined in the statutes and laws governing universities. The information collected from the document analysis guided the development of the interview schedule used for data collection. The study population consisted of ten (10) public universities in Ghana. Of the ten, five were the oldest universities in Ghana, specifically, the University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Education, Winneba, University of Development Studies, and the University of Cape Coast. The other five were relatively newly established universities: the University of Health and Allied Sciences, the University of Energy and Natural Resources, the University of Environment and Sustainable Development, Ghana Communication Technology University, and the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. At the time of the interview, which lasted from July 10th to July 24th, 2023, fourteen (14) interviewees were purposively sampled and allowed to participate freely.

Ethical considerations were adhered to in carrying out this study. Participation in the research was voluntary, and the study participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information provided. The participants were also assured they could opt out of the study anytime. The researchers did not compensate the participants for their involvement in the study. Finally, the researchers did not receive any funding for the study, nor did they have any conflict of interest in the study, and, as such, they did not manipulate the data collected in any way.

At the end of the two weeks, fourteen (14) librarians from seven of the ten universities sampled were available and interviewed. An interview schedule consisting of ten questions was used to interview librarians to seek their perceptions of their roles, status, and implications on their career progression. Each interview lasted at most one hour. At the end of the data collection, the interviews were transcribed, and using NVIVO software version 14, data was thematically analysed reflexively to identify codes and themes to bring out present data patterns and the dominant themes.

Findings

Sample characteristics

Fourteen participants (eight males and six females) aged between 30 and above 50 years were purposively sampled from seven university libraries. The majority ( $n = 10$ ) had worked for 5 years and above 20 years in the academic library setting, while 4 had worked for less than 5 years. Also, most ( $n = 6$ ) had an MPhil qualification in Information

Studies, while ( $n = 4$ ) each had a Ph.D. in Information Studies and an M. A. in Information Studies, respectively. (See Table 1.)

Themes

In exploring the roles and responsibilities assigned to librarians who work in university libraries, which was the study’s first objective, four themes were generated using Nvivo software version 14. These are research support, teaching, and managerial/administrative roles. Roles and responsibilities are the duties assigned to librarians in academic institutions. These duties are performed in support of the university’s vision and mission.

Research support role

Considering the role of librarians who work in university libraries, there was a strong theme for providing research support roles to the university community (identified explicitly by all 14 participants). In providing research support, librarians collect, organise, preserve, retrieve, and disseminate information relevant to the courses taught in the institutions. These resources may be provided from the library’s collection or other libraries through inter-library loans to make these resources accessible within the university community (explicit in nine interviews). They assist users in accessing, retrieving, and using information and resources to solve their information needs. Professional guidance is critical in providing research support in academic libraries, illustrated by a quote from “interviewee 2, a female Junior Assistant librarian.

‘The Librarian is responsible for providing professional guidance to patrons in their research endeavours in the university community. He provides information and learning resources to meet the teaching and learning needs of the academic community’

Table 1  
Characteristics of participants.

| Item                                                  | Male ( $n = 8$ ) | Female ( $n = 6$ ) |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Age group (years)                                     |                  |                    |
| 30–39                                                 | 3                | 3                  |
| 40–49                                                 | 2                | 2                  |
| 50 and above                                          | 3                | 1                  |
| Total                                                 | 8                | 6                  |
| University of Affiliation                             |                  |                    |
| University of Health and Allied Sciences              | 1                | 0                  |
| University of Ghana                                   | 4                | 3                  |
| University of Development Studies                     | 1                | 0                  |
| University of Education, Winneba                      | 1                | 0                  |
| University of Cape Coast                              | 1                | 1                  |
| Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology    | 0                | 1                  |
| University of Environment and Sustainable Development | 1                | 0                  |
| Total                                                 | 9                | 5                  |
| Years in Service                                      |                  |                    |
| Less than five years                                  | 3                | 1                  |
| 5 to 10 years                                         | 1                | 2                  |
| 11 to 15 years                                        | 0                | 1                  |
| 16 to 20 years                                        | 2                | 0                  |
| Above 20 years                                        | 2                | 2                  |
| Total                                                 | 8                | 6                  |
| Academic Qualification                                |                  |                    |
| MA in Information Studies                             | 2                | 2                  |
| MPhil in Information Studies                          | 4                | 2                  |
| Ph.D. in Information Studies                          | 2                | 2                  |
| Total                                                 | 8                | 6                  |

(interviewee 2, a female Junior Assistant Librarian)

She explained that the Librarian uses their expertise and contacts with other libraries to provide books and resources to support the teaching and research needs of the university community. Also, these librarians help students gain insight into the research process and help them organise and manage their references, among other things.

#### *Teaching role*

Librarians performing teaching functions was also a dominant theme. The Librarian trains users on locating, accessing, and using the library's resources to meet their information needs. "Interviewee 1, a male Senior Assistant Librarian, illustrated the teaching role of librarians in this description.

'The Librarian is a teacher. He develops programs and teaches them to users through instructions and user education to enable them to utilize the library resources fully. Although these may not be credit-bearing courses in the university, they educate the students on using information and library resources'

(Interviewee 1, a male Senior Assistant Librarian)

Librarians working in university libraries educate their users in using their resources through their library instruction sessions for the full benefit of their users. Although these lessons are not mandatory and non-scoring in some universities, they are critical in building the capacity of the university community members to be independent users of library resources.

#### *Managerial role*

Librarians, especially the university library or library director, perform managerial roles as the manager or director of the library. They provide managerial and administrative services and ensure systems are in place for the library's effective management, use, and maintenance. They also serve as liaisons between the university management and other library staff and ensure that policies and decisions made by the university management are carried out, as indicated by 8 interviewees. "Interviewee 10, a male assistant librarian, said that.

'The university librarian links the university management and the library staff. They liaise with top management to make decisions concerning the development of the library and ensure that systems are in place for the library's effective management, use, and maintenance to support the mission and vision of the institution'

(Interviewee 10, a male assistant librarian)

The study's second objective was to understand the librarians' status, promotion, and career progression and their implications on their job satisfaction. Librarians who work in public universities progress along either the academic or professional cadre. Findings from the data collected through the interviews of the study participants revealed that librarians were assigned either the academic or professional cadre in their universities. However, the line of association depended on understanding the library and the cadre assigned to it as indicated in the university's statutes independent of the Librarian's qualification. While most eight (8) of the librarians who participated in this study were aligned to the academic cadre, six (6) were aligned to the professional cadre in their universities. All fourteen (14) study participants further explained that their appointment letters indicated their status without their consultation. This is illustrated by:

Interviewee 4: 'I have an M.A. in Information Studies, and I have academic status in my university. In my university, the library is considered an academic unit, so we librarians are considered academic staff. This was determined from the point of entry. That is, right from my application process so many years ago when MA. was

the minimum requirement to work in the library. I completed the academic staff employment form, undertook a demonstration teaching, and was appointed after my satisfactory performance at the interview'

(interviewee 4, a female Junior Assistant Librarian with over 20 years of working experience)

Interviewee 10, a male assistant librarian, on the other hand, indicated that 'I have an MPhil in Information Studies, but I am on the professional cadre in my university because the library is placed under central administration. My status was determined at the point of entry and indicated in my employment letter'

(Interviewee 10, a male assistant librarian)

The participants explained that in some universities, the library is perceived as an academic unit; hence, their librarians are aligned with the academic cadre and have no opportunity to choose where to belong. Again, some other participants indicated that the path they routed their employment applications determined their status. Therefore, a librarian was assigned the professional status if their application was routed through the professional path and vice versa, revealing the disparity in the alignment of university libraries along the academic or professional cadre in Ghana.

Promotion and Career progression are critical issues in the workplace as they provide empowerment and motivation. Promotion is guided by policies that outline the requirements along the academic and professional cadre in the university. Findings from the study showed varying responses to the knowledge of promotion guidelines and the criteria for promotion. All but one (1) participant did not have any knowledge of her institution's promotion policy.

Interviewee 2 (a female junior assistant librarian) indicated, 'I am unsure if we have a promotion document. 'I have not seen it at my university, and I have never read it.' Interviewee 2

(a female junior assistant librarian)

Also, while eight (8) participants had read their university's promotion guideline not more than three months ago, the remaining five (5) participants had not read it in over a year, explaining that they usually consulted the promotion guideline when preparing for their promotions.

The last objective of the study was to identify the challenges librarians working in academic libraries faced with their promotion and career progression and their implications on job satisfaction. Remaining on one level or rank in a profession for a long time without promotion hinders one's career progression and can be demotivating and stressful for employees. The study participants recounted several challenges they faced with their promotion and career progression and its implications on their job satisfaction. These challenges have been categorized under the following theme: role inconsistencies, stagnation/lack of promotion, and an unclear career path.

#### *Role inconsistencies*

Roles are the duties assigned to individuals and their corresponding lines of accountability, progression, and remuneration. University employees perform academic (teaching, research) or professional (professional and administrative) roles commensurate with their status. The findings, however, identified some role inconsistencies as described by interviewees 10 and 11, both male assistant librarians with professional status.

'The Librarian's role is more academic than administrative (interviewee 10, a male assistant librarian with professional status). 'I do a lot of academic work, although I am considered a professional staff'' (interviewee 11, a male assistant librarian with professional status)

These librarians explained that although their status as professionals required that they train and help users use the library's resources, they

had to spend a lot of time training users to use the library's resources compared with their other professional duties.

### *Stagnation/lack of promotion*

Several librarians had challenges with stagnation or delays in their promotion. Explaining,

"Interviewee 1, a male senior assistant librarian with over 20 years of working experience and of professional status, mentioned stagnation and a lack of promotion. 'As professionals, we must wait six years on a rank before progressing to the next rank. The waiting period is too long, making it impossible for most of us to reach the top, which does not make the work attractive for new entrants'. There is no office time for the Librarian to do personal studies and prepare adequately for their promotion'"

(Interviewee 1, a male senior assistant librarian with over 20 years of working experience)

Again, "Interviewee (5) indicated that 'the pressure of combining library work, teaching, and publishing made it challenging to meet the publication requirements for promotion in the academic cadre.' He also indicated the lack of time to research while carrying out official and professional duties." interviewee (5).

### *The presence of an unclear career path*

"Interviewee 4, a junior assistant librarian with over 20 years of experience with academic status, indicated 'that studies have shown that librarians should have the same rank as classroom teachers so that they are empowered to perform their role and promote academic pursuits, but this is not so in my university. It is also not easy to publish alongside the magnitude of work, making it difficult to progress. An unclear career path and a lack of great mentors make promotion difficult. Library senior members are also denied what is due them as academic staff Interviewee 4, a junior assistant librarian.'

Staff requires a minimum qualification of a doctoral degree in their area of specialisation to be aligned with the academic cadre in universities. These academic staff engage in university teaching, research, and extension services. On the other hand, professional staff engage in professional and administrative activities and do not require a doctoral degree but a master's degree to work in universities in Ghana.

From the ensuing discussion, an academic librarian is a professional librarian with a postgraduate degree who works in a university library. The academic Librarian contributes immensely to Academia and higher education (Association of College and Research Library, 2010) by providing formal and informal library instruction, guidance, and support in the accessibility and ethical use of information to faculty, students, and staff in their scholarly endeavours.

## **Discussion**

In understanding the perception of librarians concerning their roles as academic librarians, the study codes were created from the data collected through the interviews. Using reflexive thematic content analysis, providing research support, teaching, and performing administrative duties were identified. These roles cut across the two categories of university staff employed, i.e., teaching and administrative/professional staff. Professionally, these librarians acquire, organise, promote, preserve, and share resources and information responsive to the university community's teaching, learning, and research needs (Donkor, 2021; Harris, 2016). These professional duties, such as cataloguing and classifications, are mainly performed at the back end of the library and may not be visible and understood by the university community.

After performing their professional duties and organising the

information resources in the library, these librarians conduct training sessions to help users identify, locate, and use the resources ethically for their research pursuits. They also develop programs and courses, provide subject librarianship, and teach faculty and students about the ethical use of information for their study and research purposes. Concerning the teaching role librarians play in university libraries, Panda (2014) and Charing and Gardiner (2017) believe that academic librarians blend the 'academic world' and the 'world of practice' of librarianship, bridging the gaps between the Library and Information Science world of practice and Academia. While Panda calls them "pracademics," Charing and Gardiner (2017) call them "practitioner-researchers." Scholars advocate that this new generation of academic librarians should be identified, recognized, and supported to benefit their educational institutions (Charing & Gardiner, 2017; Panda, 2014; Zai, 2015). Additionally, some of these librarians, predominantly the university librarian and the heads of the various departments within the library, perform managerial duties such as serving as a liaison between the library staff and the university's management, ensuring that decisions taken at the executive level are implemented to the benefit of the university.

In these times of increased desire for higher education, research, and scholarship and the proliferation of information and technology, the study revealed that although all fourteen (14) participants had a minimum qualification of a second degree, there was a shift from the minimum requirement of an M.A. in Information Studies/Librarianship degree to an MPhil in Information Studies and a Ph.D. degree in recent years. This finding corroborates a study by Salaam and Onifade (2009) and Boshoff and Lamprey (2020), who indicated that librarians are seeking higher qualifications to be employable and have the requisite research skills needed to support the research and information needs of their university community over the last decade (Bladek, 2019; Nyarko et al., 2016; Salaam & Onifade, 2009; Wyss, 2010).

Status is linked to identity, rank, and position and is usually considered a prestige greatly influenced by situations, such as an academic appointment or giving tenure to academic librarians. Several studies (Aby, 2011; Parida, 1999; Salaam & Onifade, 2009) have been conducted on the status of librarians due to the discrepancies surrounding academic librarians' status. It was evident from the study that librarians working in public university libraries in Ghana are categorized as professional/administrative or academic staff based on the classification of their library as a professional/administrative unit or an academic unit. However, scholars (Ajidahun, 2021; Charing & Gardiner, 2017) recommend that academic librarians be given faculty status due to their pivotal role in providing professional, academic, and managerial functions supporting the university's teaching, learning, and research activities.

Lastly, in identifying the challenges librarians face in their promotion and career progression at public university libraries, the study revealed role inconsistencies, stagnation/lack of promotion, and an unclear career path. Career progression is critical in the workplace as it serves as a source of empowerment and motivation. The study, however, revealed challenges with inconsistent roles assigned to these librarians.

Again, stagnation/lack of promotion was challenging for librarians working in university libraries. Librarians aligned with the professional cadre complained of waiting six (6) years on one level or rank before qualifying for promotion. This long waiting period is a demotivating factor for them, hurting their job satisfaction. Again, the study revealed the unclear career progression path and the desire of librarians to choose their career path, i.e., professional cadre or academic cadre. Also, librarians did not have time to pursue their research requirements for promotion, although those aligned with the academic cadre require publications for their promotion. The challenge of the unavailability of mentors to guide and collaborate with for research and publication was also evident in the study.

## Conclusion

The changing environment in which academic libraries exist and user demands have created the need for change in academic librarianship, leading to changes in librarians' qualification requirements, roles, and responsibilities. In seeking to understand the perception of librarians concerning the changing academic librarianship landscape, this study used the qualitative approach to collect responses from fourteen (14) participants from seven public universities in Ghana. The findings showed that librarians in academic libraries performed three prominent roles: research support, teaching, and managerial/administrative roles. Also, it was evident from the study that the qualification requirement for employment as a professional librarian has gradually shifted from an M. A. in Information Science/Librarianship to an MPhil in Information Science/Librarianship (for professional status) and progressively from MPhil in Information Science/Librarianship MPhil to a Ph.D. in Information Science/Librarianship (for academic status) in recent years to compensate for the changing roles of librarians. The university library is, indeed, as good as its librarians. However, these librarians' status and career progression has remained the same, irrespective of the changing academic librarianship landscape. This creates challenges of stagnation/lack of promotion, role inconsistencies, and the need for uniformity in the status assigned to academic librarians. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that consistency be created in the roles and responsibilities of academic librarians working in university libraries in Ghana. Their roles of providing research support, teaching, and performing managerial/administrative roles should be recognized and included in the statutes and policies of universities to make their roles and responsibilities explicitly known.

Also, the management of university libraries should consider the totality of the changing academic librarianship landscape (qualification, roles, status, and career progression) and not only enforce the demand for higher qualifications of MPhil and PhD in Information Science from librarians. While librarians are expected to possess higher qualifications, their status should be commensurate with their degrees. This can be achieved by allowing librarians to choose the path of progression they desire (professional/academic) and be bound by the criteria for progression. Also, the academic status could be assigned to academic libraries and the librarians working there, as has been the case in recent years. Such librarians should be aligned with the academic cadre in their universities and be bound by the criteria for progression.

Academic librarians should engage more in collaborations, networks, partnerships, and mentorship to improve their abilities and opportunities for research to enable them to meet their research and publications requirements for promotion. Finally, the management of universities should consider reducing the six-year waiting period to qualify for promotion as a requirement on the professional cadre. This will enable high-performing professional librarians to progress quickly, leading to high performance and job satisfaction.

The findings of this study have practical implications for policy-makers in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and researchers to understand the perception of the roles, status, and career progression of the librarians working in academic libraries in Ghana and to inform policy decisions.

## Limitations of the study

Although the field experience was exciting, the researchers had some challenges. This included the unwillingness of some librarians in public universities to participate in the study. The researchers were able to convince a majority of them to participate. However, those unwilling to participate were included in the data collection process in conformity with the ethical requirements of not compelling respondents to participate in the research. Also, the study sample was limited to public universities in Ghana. It will be necessary to replicate this study among the private universities in Ghana to understand the perceptions of the role,

status, and career progression of librarians working in university libraries in Ghana.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Antonia Bernadette Donkor:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Amy Pascalia Abra Asimah:** Methodology, Conceptualization. **Williams Ezinwa Nwagwu:** Methodology, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

Antonia Bernadette Donkor-None.  
Amy Pascalia Abra Asimah-None.  
Williams Ezinwa Nwagwu-None.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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