



Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict: An Empirical Investigation into the Diminishing Authority of University Librarians in Decision-Making Processes

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the institutional power dynamics and organizational conflicts that contribute to the diminishing authority of university librarians in decision-making processes within Nigerian universities. It aims to identify structural, political, and cultural factors that marginalize librarians in governance, and to propose strategies for enhancing their influence and participation.

Design/methodology/approach: A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The population consisted of 12 purposefully selected participants: 3 university librarians, 3 deputy librarians, 3 senior academic staff, and 3 key administrative officers from four universities in South-South Nigeria—Benson Idahosa University, Ambrose Alli University, Delta State University, and Igbinedion University. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic content analysis.

Findings: The study reveals that university librarians face systemic exclusion from strategic governance, evidenced by high agreement on statements regarding diminished authority ($M = 3.62$), weakened autonomy ($M = 3.72$), and delayed policy implementation due to conflict ($M = 3.84$). The interview responses corroborate these results, highlighting issues such as inadequate academic recognition, poor representation on decision-making bodies, and limited control over funding. The respondents supported five key strategies for improving librarian authority: formalized governance roles, leadership training, faculty-equivalent status, strategic alliances, and increased scholarly engagement.

Practical implications: Universities can strengthen institutional governance by formally integrating librarians into decision-making bodies and supporting their leadership development. This ensures more inclusive and effective academic policy formation.

Social implications: Empowering librarians enhances their capacity to support teaching, research, and learning, ultimately benefiting students, faculty, and the broader academic community.

Originality/value: This study offers an empirically grounded, region-specific exploration of how institutional dynamics erode librarian authority. It contributes original insights and actionable strategies for elevating librarians as key stakeholders in university governance.

Keywords: University Librarianship; Institutional Governance; Power Dynamics; Organizational Conflict; Academic Leadership

Introduction

Institutional power dynamics significantly shape the nature and outcomes of conflicts within academic libraries, especially concerning the decision-making authority of university librarians. Nwofor et al. (2024) demonstrated that poor communication, role ambiguity, and limited resources are major sources of conflict, which in turn weaken librarians' ability to assert leadership and guide library operations effectively. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2023) emphasised that shifts in governance models often marginalise traditional academic authorities, including librarians, when informal power structures override formal collegial processes. Williams (2024) also argued that when decision-making authority is concentrated in a few administrative hands, librarians often find their professional autonomy eroded, leading to frustration, diminished performance, and organisational dissatisfaction.

The erosion of collegial governance exacerbates the marginalisation of university librarians in institutional decision-making structures. Eslen-Ziya and Yildirim (2021) highlighted that universities, while professing ideals of collegiality, remain spaces where informal hierarchies and traditional biases persist, often sidelining roles like that of the librarian. Manky and Saravia (2021) further illustrated how exclusion from key decision-making networks leads to inequitable treatment and undermines organisational cohesion. Williams (2024) confirmed that unequal power distribution within institutions correlates with increased conflict, lower morale, and dissatisfaction, particularly among staff whose roles, such as librarians, are perceived as peripheral to central governance. Thus, while collegial governance theoretically supports shared authority, practical realities often disempower university librarians.

A failure to address these internal power imbalances has serious consequences for library performance and organisational stability. Williams (2024) found that equitable and transparent power sharing within organisations fosters collaboration and reduces conflict, suggesting that restoring librarians' decision-making authority could improve institutional harmony. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2023) similarly argued that when academic professionals, including librarians, are meaningfully included in governance, institutions benefit from stronger innovation and greater legitimacy. Nwofor et al. (2024) also stressed that conflict resolution strategies such as policy reviews, team building, and open communication are essential for empowering staff like librarians and restoring functional, collaborative environments within academic libraries.

External political interference further compounds the erosion of university librarians' authority by destabilizing merit-based governance structures. Dambuya (2023) warned that politically-driven appointments in universities undermine institutional integrity, often sidelining professional expertise, including that of librarians, in favour of political loyalty. Altbach and Knight (2007) emphasized that when leadership prioritizes political interests over academic professionalism, critical support units like libraries suffer neglect and marginalization. Zgaga (2010) also noted that universities compromised by political interference lose international credibility, limiting opportunities for library partnerships, funding, and global scholarly exchange. In this climate, the authority of university librarians in decision-making is not just diminished internally but weakened externally, threatening the broader mission of academic excellence and innovation.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the nature and structure of institutional power relations within university governance and how they influence the authority of university librarians in decision-making processes;
2. investigate the extent to which organisational conflicts affect the participation of university librarians in strategic and administrative decision-making;
3. identify the factors contributing to the erosion of university librarian authority in academic and policy-related institutional decisions; and
4. propose strategies for strengthening the role and influence of university librarians in institutional governance and conflict resolution frameworks.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature was based on the following: Nature and structure of institutional power relations within university governance, and how they influence the authority of university librarians in decision-making processes

The nature and structure of institutional power relations within university governance are increasingly shaped by the complexity of modern governance systems, where both internal and external actors compete for influence. Luo et al. (2024) emphasise that institutional layouts, particularly dimensions of time, space, and quantity, critically shape governance capabilities, with strategic arrangements fostering flexibility, responsiveness, and efficient resource management. This is consistent with Shin and Jones' (2022) assertion that governance in higher education now involves multiple agents and levels of authority, where both state coordination and institutional management interlock to affect decision-making processes. Furthermore, Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) observe that, although global trends have promoted stakeholder-oriented governance, national traditions and academic elites still mediate these transformations, creating hybrid models of governance where authority is increasingly shared but unevenly distributed. Together, these findings highlight that university governance structures are not monolithic; rather, they are dynamic, stratified, and deeply influenced by historical, political, and organisational contexts.

Within this evolving landscape, the authority of university librarians in decision-making processes is directly impacted by the way power is institutionalized and operationalised. Malhan (2018) underscores that transformational leadership and flexible decision-making processes are necessary for libraries, particularly in special settings, to assert relevance and integrate effectively into organisational value chains. However, the broader shift towards corporate governance models described by Shin and Jones (2022) often centralises authority within senior management and external boards, marginalising traditional collegial actors like librarians. Bo'tas and Huisman (2012) further explain that governments, through funding controls and strategic management demands, exert influence that indirectly filters down to limit the autonomy of internal decision-making bodies, including libraries. Consequently, university librarians find themselves needing to demonstrate strategic value and align closely with institutional goals to maintain influence in governance processes that prioritise external accountability and market responsiveness.

The structure of university governance also creates opportunities and constraints depending on how institutional environments evolve and how librarians position themselves within these frameworks. Luo et al. (2024) found that institutions that actively optimise resource

flow and foster cross-departmental collaboration improve governance outcomes, a condition that librarians can leverage by becoming central hubs for interdisciplinary communication and knowledge management. Symonds (2020) discusses how traditional power structures, including roles like librarianship, are being renegotiated under new market-driven paradigms, where students are seen as consumers and knowledge as a transactional good, thus reshaping librarians' interactions and authority. Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) further argue that despite managerial reforms, academic autonomy still retains resilience in certain contexts, suggesting that librarians who align their services with academic values (like knowledge democratisation and open access) can preserve or even enhance their governance influence. Thus, librarians' strategic alignment with institutional missions and responsiveness to shifting governance priorities is critical for sustaining decision-making authority.

Finally, systemic factors such as tenure thresholds, bureaucratic inertia, and resource constraints significantly shape librarians' ability to exert influence within governance structures. Luo et al. (2024) point out that prolonged tenure without structural reforms can cause stagnation and governance fatigue, signalling a need for continuous innovation and adaptability, qualities that librarians must embody to maintain strategic relevance. Shin and Jones (2022) observe that neoliberal reforms have led to governance systems that emphasise performance metrics and accountability, creating both challenges and opportunities for librarians who must navigate these expectations while promoting scholarly values. Bo'tas and Huisman (2012) further reveal that no one-size-fits-all model exists for higher education governance, suggesting that librarians must adopt context-sensitive strategies to enhance their participation in decision-making bodies. Altogether, the contemporary governance environment requires university librarians to be proactive, networked, and strategically adaptive to sustain and expand their roles in institutional decision-making processes.

The extent to which organisational conflicts affect the Participation of University Librarians in Strategic and Administrative Decision-Making

Organisational conflict significantly affects the participation of university librarians in strategic and administrative decision-making, often undermining their effectiveness and influence. Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) observed that conflict is now a daily reality in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with frequent clashes between staff, students, and management, particularly in regions like Sokoto metropolis. This persistent conflict culture disrupts administrative flow, and for university librarians, whose roles already straddle academic and administrative domains, such turbulence creates barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Abazeed (2017) emphasised that while conflict can sometimes foster healthy competition, if mismanaged, it turns dysfunctional and cripples' organizational operations, leading to marginalization of critical stakeholders like librarians. Similarly, Ugwuanyi and Idoko (2012) noted that conflicts arising from inadequate resources and high emotional stress in academic libraries not only diminish staff morale but also curtail their ability to engage productively in broader institutional governance. Consequently, unresolved organisational conflicts limit librarians' input in strategic discussions, depriving universities of valuable insights in resource management, user services, and knowledge infrastructure development.

The leadership styles adopted by university authorities also play a pivotal role in determining how conflicts impact librarian participation in governance. Ogbuiyi (2019) found that leadership style directly influences conflict management approaches among university librarians, noting a preference for collaborative and accommodating strategies rather than

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

avoidance or competition. When leaders favour authoritarian or exclusionary decision-making processes, conflicts are exacerbated, creating an environment where librarians feel alienated from strategic administrative discussions. Azubuike (2022) supported this view by highlighting the need for effective planning and coordination to manage conflict and enhance service delivery within college libraries, suggesting that a structured, inclusive leadership approach is vital. Furthermore, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) pointed out that the personality traits and leadership styles of administrators in Sokoto significantly contribute to persistent conflicts, indicating that leadership reform is essential for improving librarians' participation in decision-making. Without addressing the leadership-conflict nexus, university librarians remain peripheral figures in institutional governance, weakening the academic support system universities rely upon.

The nature and causes of conflict within universities also explain why librarians' participation in strategic and administrative decision-making is often compromised. According to Abazeed (2017), common conflict triggers include goal differences, resource competition, and communication gaps, issues that are prevalent in many university libraries. Ugwuanyi and Idoko (2012) similarly identified unclear policies and environmental stressors as frequent sources of discord in academic libraries, which, if left unmanaged, escalate into broader institutional tensions that discourage librarians' involvement in governance matters. Ogbuiyi (2019) argued that fostering collective interests and maintaining open communication among librarians through regular meetings could mitigate these challenges and strengthen their role in decision-making. In the absence of such proactive conflict management measures, the frequent protests, strikes, and administrative bottlenecks described by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) continue to erode librarians' confidence and visibility in institutional policy development, leaving them reactive rather than proactive participants in university affairs.

Nevertheless, while conflicts pose serious challenges, strategic conflict management practices offer opportunities for librarians to reclaim active roles in university governance. Azubuike (2022) emphasised that coordinated conflict management strategies significantly enhance service delivery, which by extension, strengthens librarians' strategic positioning within universities. Ugwuanyi and Idoko (2012) also stressed the importance of dialogue, clear communication, and clarification of institutional rules as tools for preventing conflict escalation and promoting a healthier work environment conducive to inclusive decision-making. Similarly, Abazeed (2017) noted that early identification and resolution of conflicts are crucial leadership skills that directly impact organisational commitment, suggesting that empowering librarians with conflict management skills could enhance their administrative engagement. Thus, while the extent of conflict's impact on librarian participation is high, institutions that invest in effective conflict management frameworks can transform conflicts into catalysts for inclusive governance, ensuring that librarians are integral players in shaping their universities' strategic futures.

Factors Contributing to the Erosion of University Librarians' Authority in Academic and Policy-Related Institutional Decisions

The erosion of university librarians' authority in academic and policy-related decisions is significantly driven by institutional barriers that hinder effective library usage and resource management. Achugbue et al. (2024) found that factors such as inconvenient library hours, poor location, lack of user orientation, and unsupportive staff directly reduce the visibility and relevance of library services to students. When libraries are underutilised due to these barriers, it diminishes the librarians' perceived importance within the academic ecosystem, weakening their voice in institutional policymaking. Ajayi et al. (2021) further highlight that institutional failures

like delayed budget releases and weak infrastructure support exacerbate these challenges, limiting the library's ability to align collections with academic needs. The combination of these systemic issues marginalises librarians in broader academic governance discussions, as they are seen less as intellectual partners and more as service providers struggling with basic operational issues. Mahmoudi et al. (2019) reinforce this point by showing that when trust between library management and stakeholders is low, often due to perceived communication and empowerment failures, librarians' credibility and influence within their institutions suffer further setbacks.

Another major contributor to the declining authority of librarians is the increasing legal and administrative scrutiny faced by universities, which reshapes institutional governance structures to the detriment of traditional academic autonomy. Wong (2024) argues that universities' historic autonomy has eroded under modern legal frameworks that treat them as quasi-public administrative bodies subject to court interventions. This shift undermines collegial governance models, where librarians once played consultative and decision-making roles, and replaces them with bureaucratic oversight that marginalises specialised professional voices like those of librarians. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2023) similarly demonstrate that the erosion of collegiality, replaced by managerial models emphasising compliance and performance metrics, leaves little room for librarians to assert their expertise in academic or policy forums. Furthermore, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) stress that unresolved conflicts between university authorities and their staff, exacerbated by poor communication and the absence of dialogue mechanisms, foster institutional environments where librarians' perspectives are either sidelined or perceived as adversarial, rather than collaborative.

Structural inequities in academic status also critically diminish librarians' authority in institutional decision-making. Ajidahun (2021) shows that despite fulfilling many of the same research, publication, and teaching expectations as faculty, librarians in Nigerian universities lack full academic parity, often being excluded from leadership roles and governance structures. This "second-tier" status effectively bars them from influential forums where major academic and policy decisions are made. Leebaw and Logsdon (2020) add that even when librarians achieve nominal faculty status, their position remains precarious, particularly in a higher education environment increasingly shaped by neoliberal policies that devalue traditional academic freedoms. Mahmoudi, et al. (2019) support this by highlighting how weak communication and delegation practices within libraries themselves can mirror and reinforce broader systemic exclusion, limiting librarians' ability to advocate for their expertise or to engage fully with institutional priorities. Without equal footing or strong internal networks, librarians' contributions to academic and policy decisions become increasingly peripheral.

Finally, the broader environment of resource scarcity and operational pressures on academic institutions compounds the weakening of librarian authority. Ajayi et al. (2021) emphasise that insufficient budgets, staffing shortages, and increasing digital demands place libraries in a reactive rather than strategic position, forcing librarians to focus on survival rather than leadership. Achugbue, et al. (2024) similarly point out that limitations like short operating hours and inadequate user support not only reduce library engagement but also send a message to the academic community that library services are not central to the university's mission. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2023) argue that modern governance models prioritise market-oriented goals over academic values, meaning that resource-constrained libraries are often overlooked in strategic planning. In this context, librarians struggle to assert their relevance or to influence institutional policies, especially as universities favour revenue-generating units and functions

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

that align more closely with external performance indicators over the foundational but less quantifiable role of libraries in supporting critical inquiry and academic success.

Strategies for Strengthening the Role and Influence of University Librarians in Institutional Governance and Conflict Resolution Frameworks

Strengthening the role and influence of university librarians in institutional governance and conflict resolution frameworks requires a strategic, multidimensional approach. Mmejim and Umahi (2019) recommend that professional bodies like the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) collaborate to create clear policies defining librarians' roles in conflict resolution. By positioning libraries at the forefront of peace campaigns and public awareness initiatives, librarians can reclaim their traditional roles as critical information providers and social stabilisers. Nwokocha (2020) further emphasises that effective conflict management relies heavily on skilled communication and negotiation, suggesting that librarians should be trained in these areas to better mediate disputes and contribute meaningfully to institutional decision-making. Additionally, Egberomgbe (2018) highlights that implementing quality management (QM) frameworks in academic libraries enhances operational efficiency, making librarians more credible and influential participants in governance structures.

Another crucial strategy involves enhancing librarians' social support functions and promoting inclusivity within university communities. Mmejim and Umahi (2019) argue that libraries should address social exclusion by fostering literacy and information access, thereby contributing to societal cohesion and democratic participation. Integrating these social initiatives with conflict resolution frameworks ensures that libraries are seen not merely as repositories of books but as proactive agents for social change. Egberomgbe (2018) supports this by suggesting that libraries adopting comprehensive QM strategies will be better equipped to respond innovatively to emerging societal needs, including conflict mitigation. Furthermore, as Nwokocha (2020) notes, the absence of effective information management systems can escalate conflicts; therefore, librarians must lead in developing transparent communication channels that preempt misunderstandings and promote dialogue-based resolution methods.

Finally, to consolidate their role in governance and conflict management, librarians must become more proactive and innovative in-service delivery and public engagement. Mmejim and Umahi (2019) advocate for visible, grassroots-level initiatives such as the use of posters in public places to raise awareness about the dangers of conflict and the value of democracy. This strategy not only positions libraries as hubs of civic education but also builds public trust in their authority on governance matters. Egberomgbe (2018) underscores that sustained quality improvements in service delivery can significantly enhance the reputation of academic libraries, making them indispensable to university administrations. Moreover, Nwokocha (2020) stresses that conflict resolution skills like collaboration and effective communication are essential in fostering cooperative environments, suggesting that librarians trained in these skills can bridge gaps between diverse campus groups, ultimately reinforcing their influence in institutional governance and stability efforts.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of institutional power dynamics, organisational conflict, and the erosion of university librarians' authority. The population of the study is three (3) university librarians, three (3) deputy librarians, three (3)

senior academic staff, and 3 key administrative officers from selected public and private universities in South-South Nigeria. These Universities are Benson Idahosa University – Benin City, Edo State; Ambrose Alli University (AAU) – Ekpoma, Edo State; Delta State University (DELSU) – Abraka, Delta State; Igbinedion University – Okada, Edo State. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who have direct involvement or influence in university governance structures and decision-making processes. Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires distributed to a broad sample to quantify perceptions, experiences, and observed trends, alongside semi-structured interviews conducted with university librarians and key administrators to gain deeper, contextual insights into the power relations and conflict dynamics. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., mean scores) with the aid of SPSS software, while qualitative data from interviews was subjected to thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and underlying factors

Research Findings

Table 1: Examination of the Nature and Structure of Institutional Power Relations

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	DE
1	The university's governance structure limits the decision-making authority of the university librarian.	3.62	0.65	SA
2	Senior administrative officers dominate decisions that affect library operations.	2.64	0.92	A
3	University librarians are often excluded from high-level strategic planning meetings.	2.49	0.77	D
4	Decision-making processes in the university recognize the university librarian's leadership role.	2.36	0.83	D
5	Institutional policies favour faculty deans more than university librarians.	2.10	0.69	D
6	The chain of command in the university weakens the librarian's autonomy in administrative matters.	3.72	0.58	SA

The results presented in Table 1 reveal a concerning pattern of institutional power relations that significantly constrain the authority of university librarians in governance. With high mean scores of 3.62 and 3.72, the respondents strongly agreed that the governance structure limits librarians' decision-making authority and that the chain of command weakens their autonomy. These findings point to a systemic issue where university librarians operate under tight administrative controls that diminish their professional independence. This is further echoed by one of the respondents who stated, “In my university, decision-making is mostly controlled by the Vice Chancellor and top management, leaving the librarian with very little say, even though our work is central to academics, which can sometimes make us feel like we're just background support.” Additionally, the agreement with the statement that senior administrative officers dominate decisions affecting library operations (mean = 2.64) reflects a power imbalance that undermines librarians' strategic input in institutional affairs.

Moreover, the lower mean scores of 2.49, 2.36, and 2.10 for statements regarding inclusion in strategic meetings, recognition of leadership roles, and parity with faculty deans,

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

respectively, indicate that librarians are systematically side-lined in key decision-making processes. This exclusion aligns with another interview response: “Because of the highly hierarchical system here, most important decisions flow from the top, and the librarian is mostly expected to manage the library without having much of a strategic voice, which is honestly quite limiting.” These responses provide personal insight into how institutional dynamics diminish the visibility and influence of the university librarians despite their critical role in supporting teaching, learning, and research. Collectively, the statistical and qualitative data present a compelling case for re-evaluating governance structures to ensure librarians are recognised as key stakeholders in academic decision-making.

Table 2: Investigation of the Extent to which Organizational Conflicts Affect Librarians' Participation

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	DE
1	Conflicts between library management and university administration reduce librarian participation in decision-making.	3.81	0.62	SA
2	Organizational politics often undermine the role of university librarians in governance.	3.59	0.74	SA
3	Library interests are frequently sidelined during interdepartmental conflicts.	3.27	0.88	A
4	Organizational conflicts delay library policy implementation.	3.84	0.53	SA
5	Interpersonal conflicts with senior management discourage librarians from active participation.	3.44	0.79	A
6	Lack of conflict resolution mechanisms weakens the influence of university librarians.	2.98	0.81	A

The results presented in Table 2 reveal a significant impact of organizational conflicts on the participation of university librarians in decision-making processes. The mean scores for all the six items are notably high, with four items (items 7, 8, 10, and 11) scoring above 3.40, indicating agreement or strong agreement by the respondents. Particularly, the highest mean of 3.84 with a low standard deviation (SD = 0.53) for the statement "Organizational conflicts delay library policy implementation" strongly suggests that conflict within the university administration considerably disrupts the timely execution of library-related initiatives. Similarly, the mean of 3.81 for "Conflicts between library management and university administration reduce librarian participation in decision-making" emphasizes that librarians often find themselves sidelined during administrative disputes. This supports one interviewee's remark that, "Whenever there are conflicts between management and faculties, the library tends to get caught in the crossfire, and this usually stalls library projects because leadership attention shifts away from supporting library initiatives." Additionally, organizational politics was seen as a major undermining factor (mean = 3.59), aligning with perceptions of librarians being politically marginalized during conflicts.

Furthermore, responses to items 9, 11, and 12, with mean scores between 2.98 and 3.44, highlight that librarians' interests are frequently side-lined during interdepartmental conflicts, and interpersonal clashes with senior management discourage their active participation. These findings align closely with another interview response where a librarian noted that "Conflicts within the university usually push the library to the side-lines, making it really hard for the

librarian to get any support for library programs or participate in major decisions until the crisis settles down." The slightly lower mean score of 2.98 for the absence of conflict resolution mechanisms suggests that while this factor is important, it is slightly less urgent than direct conflicts and political interference. Overall, the data clearly show that unresolved organizational conflicts significantly erode the librarian's involvement in strategic and administrative functions, thereby diminishing the library's contribution to institutional governance.

Table 3: Identification the Factors Contributing to the Erosion of Librarian Authority

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	DE
1	University policies are rarely revised to strengthen the authority of university librarians.	3.31	0.85	A
2	Inadequate recognition of librarians' academic status contributes to authority loss.	3.94	0.48	SA
3	Poor representation of librarians on key university committees erodes their authority.	2.65	0.91	A
4	Limited funding control weakens the librarian's position in university governance.	2.76	0.87	A
5	Librarians' contributions are undervalued during policy-making discussions.	3.42	0.73	A
6	Administrative bureaucracy reduces the visibility of the university librarian in governance.	2.55	0.90	A

The analysis in Table 3 reveals several critical factors contributing to the erosion of university librarians' authority within institutional governance structures. A significant proportion of the respondents agreed that university policies are rarely revised to strengthen librarians' authority (Mean = 3.31, SD = 0.85), highlighting a systemic neglect of the librarian's evolving academic and administrative role. The highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that inadequate recognition of librarians' academic status contributes significantly to their authority loss (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.48), suggesting that despite their qualifications and scholarly contributions, librarians are still often perceived as mere custodians of books rather than academic leaders. This sentiment aligns closely with an interview response where a participant lamented, "A major reason why librarians' authority keeps fading is because we are often seen as just bookkeepers rather than academic leaders, and not having voting rights at Senate meetings makes it even worse." Furthermore, some respondents acknowledged that poor representation of librarians on key university committees (Mean = 2.65, SD = 0.91) and limited funding control (Mean = 2.76, SD = 0.87) substantially undermine the librarian's capacity to influence institutional decisions, reinforcing their marginalization within university governance.

Additionally, the perception that librarians' contributions are undervalued during policy-making discussions (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.73) and that administrative bureaucracy reduces their visibility in governance (Mean = 2.55, SD = 0.90) further underscores the systemic challenges facing the profession. These findings reflect another interview participant's view that "the fact that librarians are not properly represented on key university committees and don't control meaningful budgets has greatly weakened our influence over time, leaving us almost invisible in

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

policymaking." Collectively, the survey results and interview insights illustrate a pattern where librarians are structurally and culturally excluded from critical decision-making processes, leading to a progressive erosion of their influence, visibility, and authority within university systems. This calls for urgent institutional reforms aimed at redefining and elevating the role of librarians as essential academic leaders within the university ecosystem.

Table 4: Strategies to Strengthen the Role and Influence of University Librarians

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	DE
1	Creating formalized roles for librarians in governance bodies would enhance their influence.	3.55	0.66	SA
2	Regular leadership training programmes should be organized for university librarians.	2.93	0.79	A
3	Establishing clear communication channels between librarians and university management will improve governance participation.	2.54	0.88	A
4	Librarians should be included as standing members in strategic policy-making committees.	3.60	0.62	SA
5	Conflict resolution frameworks should be redesigned to incorporate library concerns.	3.11	0.81	A
6	Librarians must be granted control over specific budgetary allocations to reinforce their leadership.	2.79	0.77	A

The findings from Table 4 reveal that the respondents generally agreed with a range of strategic proposals aimed at strengthening the role and influence of university librarians in institutional governance. The highest mean score (3.60) was recorded for the item stating that librarians should be included as standing members in strategic policy-making committees, indicating strong agreement on the necessity of formal inclusion in governance structures. Closely following was the agreement that creating formalized roles for librarians in governance bodies would enhance their influence (Mean = 3.55). This aligns with Interview Answer 1, where a respondent noted, "I strongly feel that officially making the librarian part of major decision-making committees and providing regular leadership training could go a long way in giving us a stronger voice in the university." The relatively low standard deviations for these items (0.62 and 0.66, respectively) reflect a strong consensus among participants on the importance of structured roles in boosting librarian authority.

Moderate agreement was observed on other critical areas such as conflict resolution frameworks that incorporate library concerns (Mean = 3.11) and regular leadership training programmes for librarians (Mean = 2.93), suggesting that respondents recognize these as supportive but perhaps less immediately impactful strategies. Similarly, the call for granting librarians control over specific budgetary allocations (Mean = 2.79) and establishing clear communication channels between librarians and university management (Mean = 2.54) attracted slightly lower mean scores, although respondents still agreed with their importance. These results reflect Interview Answer 2, in which a respondent explained, "The librarian's influence would definitely grow if there were clear policies giving us a formal role in governance, and if we were

given authority over certain budgets to strengthen our bargaining power in university affairs." Collectively, the data and qualitative insights emphasize that librarians need both structural inclusion and empowerment mechanisms, such as financial autonomy and leadership development, to assert their relevance in institutional governance.

Discussion of the Findings

The results of the investigation underscore a deeply entrenched pattern of institutional power dynamics that systematically marginalize university librarians in governance structures, revealing a critical disconnect between their academic contributions and administrative influence. These findings reflect the broader trends identified by Luo, Junfeng, Abbasi, and Zilong (2024), who explain that university governance is shaped by complex institutional layouts involving layered decision-making processes and strategic spatial arrangements that often limit flexibility for mid-level academic professionals like librarians. In practice, this translates into a rigid hierarchy where top administrators monopolize decision-making authority, leaving librarians with little to no strategic voice despite their pivotal role in supporting teaching and research. This scenario echoes Shin and Jones' (2022) analysis of higher education governance as increasingly corporatized, where authority is concentrated among senior executives and external boards, effectively side-lining traditional academic actors, including librarians, who are expected to function without meaningful participation in strategic dialogues. A respondent's sentiment, lamenting that the librarian is merely expected to "manage the library without having much of a strategic voice," vividly illustrates this exclusion and aligns with Bleiklie and Kogan's (2007) observation that while global governance reforms aim for inclusivity, entrenched academic elites and historical governance traditions continue to dominate. Together, these insights suggest that unless librarians can realign themselves within the evolving governance frameworks, by demonstrating institutional value, advocating for structural representation, and fostering cross-functional collaboration, their authority will remain constrained, further eroding their visibility and effectiveness in shaping the academic and administrative direction of their institutions.

Also, one of the finding reveals that organizational conflict significantly undermines the active involvement of university librarians in strategic and administrative decision-making, echoing scholarly insights that persistent discord within Nigerian tertiary institutions creates systemic barriers for library leadership. The interview responses point to a recurring pattern where librarians are sidelined during interdepartmental or administrative conflicts, often being deprived of institutional support and stripped of the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to governance processes. As one respondent observed, the library often becomes collateral damage in broader disputes, stalling initiatives and alienating staff, an outcome that Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) attribute to the entrenched culture of conflict in universities, particularly in volatile environments. This is further reinforced by Abazeed (2017), who emphasizes that unresolved conflicts, rather than promoting innovation, turn dysfunctional and marginalize vital stakeholders like librarians. The internal dynamics of academic libraries, often marked by stress, limited resources, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms, compound this marginalization, as noted by

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

Ugwuanyi and Idoko (2012), who argue that these pressures diminish morale and reduce the ability of library professionals to engage in broader institutional discourse. The leadership structure plays a pivotal role in this context; as Ogbuiyi (2019) found, exclusionary or authoritarian leadership styles exacerbate conflict and push librarians further from the decision-making table, while inclusive and collaborative strategies can mitigate tensions and foster greater participation. Thus, the qualitative and quantitative results jointly highlight that while librarians face significant challenges in the wake of organizational conflict, proactive conflict management and institutional reforms focused on inclusive governance and transparent communication are essential for repositioning them as strategic actors within the university system.

Another finding further reveals that the erosion of university librarians' authority is deeply rooted in systemic, cultural, and administrative neglect that renders their academic and governance roles almost invisible within institutional frameworks. This aligns with the finding by Ajidahun (2021), that the lack of academic parity for librarians, despite their engagement in research, teaching, and publishing, systematically excludes them from leadership roles and decision-making bodies, reducing their influence to a secondary tier. The respondents' concerns about inadequate recognition, policy neglect, and poor representation are further echoed in an interview where one librarian lamented being viewed merely as a bookkeeper without voting rights, despite their qualifications. The marginalization is not only structural but also functional, as Achugbue, et al. (2024) highlight that when libraries suffer from operational constraints like poor visibility, limited access, and underutilization, their strategic importance in academic life diminishes, weakening the librarian's bargaining power in governance. Similarly, Ajayi, et al. (2021) note that delays in budget releases and infrastructural deficiencies further isolate librarians from institutional goals, creating a perception that libraries are passive service units rather than active academic partners. These dynamics are reinforced by bureaucratic governance models, as described by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2023), which favour compliance and performance metrics over collegial input, leaving professionals like librarians with little space to assert their expertise. Coupled with the shrinking trust and communication gaps identified by Mahmoudi et al. (2019), the result is a governance environment that consistently side-lines librarians' voices in both academic and policy spheres. Addressing this erosion requires not just structural inclusion but a cultural shift in how librarianship is perceived, transitioning from support staff to strategic academic leaders integral to the university's mission.

The results from Table 4 highlight a widespread acknowledgment among the respondents that university librarians must be structurally and strategically integrated into institutional governance to enhance their influence and relevance, a sentiment echoed by both statistical trends and qualitative responses. The respondents strongly supported the inclusion of librarians in strategic decision-making bodies and the formalization of their roles within governance structures, reflecting an urgent desire for librarians to move beyond peripheral management into central institutional leadership. This aligns with Mmejim and Umahi (2019), view that such formal recognition must be accompanied by clear policies, developed in collaboration with professional bodies like the NLA and LRCN, that define librarians' conflict resolution roles and

reinforce their status as information leaders and peace agents. Similarly, Nwokocha (2020) emphasizes the importance of equipping librarians with negotiation and communication skills, which the respondents acknowledged through their agreement on the need for regular leadership training and improved communication channels with university management. These strategies support the idea that librarians can no longer operate solely as technical staff but must instead engage as proactive agents capable of shaping institutional policy, mediating disputes, and guiding academic strategy. In reinforcing this approach, Egberomgbe (2018) posits that adopting quality management systems can significantly elevate the credibility and operational efficiency of academic libraries, making librarians more effective stakeholders in governance and conflict resolution. Together, these perspectives and findings advocate for a multidimensional strategy that combines formal institutional inclusion, leadership development, strategic communication, and service innovation to strengthen the librarian's role as a vital and authoritative player within the university system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the pervasive and systemic nature of institutional power dynamics that continue to marginalize university librarians in governance and decision-making processes. Despite their essential contributions to teaching, research, and academic development, librarians remain structurally excluded from leadership circles, often confined to technical or support roles without meaningful input into strategic affairs. This marginalization reflects broader patterns in governance models that privilege senior administrators while neglecting mid-level academic professionals. The empirical evidence, reinforced by both survey data and personal accounts, underscores a governance architecture that is not only rigid and exclusionary but also blind to the intellectual and strategic value librarians bring to academic institutions. As such, without deliberate structural reforms and a rethinking of institutional priorities, librarians will continue to operate on the periphery of university governance, undermining their potential to contribute to transformative change in higher education.

Furthermore, the study has shown that organizational conflict within Nigerian universities significantly exacerbates the exclusion of librarians from institutional leadership. In environments already marked by bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource constraints, and fragmented communication, librarians often become collateral in broader administrative disputes, reducing their capacity to lead or advocate for the library's role in institutional advancement. The testimonies of marginalized librarians, coupled with existing patterns of academic conflict, highlight the urgent need for institutions to adopt inclusive, transparent conflict resolution mechanisms that recognize the library as a stakeholder, not a bystander. Leadership styles that promote collaboration, rather than authoritarianism, must be cultivated to reduce institutional tensions and empower all academic units, including libraries, to participate actively in governance. Only by addressing the toxic interplay between power imbalances and internal conflict can universities begin to harness the full potential of librarians as contributors to institutional harmony and academic excellence.

Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

Ultimately, the findings advocate for a strategic reconfiguration of university governance systems to ensure librarians are not only recognized but empowered as key academic leaders. This requires a shift from tokenistic involvement to meaningful structural representation, where librarians are granted roles on decision-making committees, control over designated budgets, and access to leadership development opportunities. Libraries must be repositioned as knowledge hubs and conflict mediators, institutions that not only support but shape academic and societal transformation. Achieving this vision will demand intentional policies from university management, advocacy from professional bodies, and a cultural shift in how librarianship is perceived within the academy. If embraced, such reforms will not only restore the authority of university librarians but also enhance the intellectual integrity, inclusivity, and strategic agility of the institutions they serve.

Recommendations

Analysing the constraints on the erosion of librarians' authority, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Strengthen Librarians' Representation in Governance Structures:** To counter the marginalization of university librarians in decision-making processes, institutions must formally embed librarians into key governance bodies, such as academic senates, faculty councils, and strategic planning committees. Direct participation ensures that librarians' expertise in information management, research support, and scholarly communication is recognized and factored into institutional policies. Without structural inclusion, librarians' influence remains symbolic rather than substantive, leading to continued erosion of their authority. Therefore, policies mandating librarian involvement at the highest levels of governance must be prioritized and enforced.
2. **Develop Leadership Training Programmes Tailored for Librarians:** Another critical step is investing in leadership development specifically tailored to the unique challenges librarians face within universities. Many conflicts stem from librarians being perceived merely as support staff rather than academic leaders. By equipping librarians with negotiation skills, political acumen, strategic communication abilities, and organizational leadership training, they can better advocate for their interests and navigate institutional power dynamics. Leadership training also builds confidence, making librarians more effective participants in administrative debates where decisions about resources, policies, and academic priorities are made.
3. **Advocate for Faculty Status or Equivalent Recognition:** Securing faculty status, or an equivalent professional standing, significantly strengthens librarians' institutional authority. Faculty status often comes with greater job security, academic freedom protections, and a voice in institutional governance, which can counterbalance administrative hierarchies that sideline library professionals. Even where formal faculty status is not possible, institutions should work towards frameworks that recognize librarians' scholarly contributions and intellectual labour as parallel to those of teaching faculty, ensuring their roles in decision-making are protected and respected.

4. **Cultivate Strategic Alliances with other Academic Units:** University librarians should actively build alliances with academic departments, research centres, and student organizations to broaden their support base. These alliances can amplify librarians' voices in governance matters and create a network of stakeholders who recognize and depend on library services. Collaboration on shared academic goals—such as information literacy programmes, open access initiatives, or digital scholarship projects—can highlight the library's central role in the academic mission, making it harder for administrators to sideline librarians in strategic decisions.
5. **Increase Visibility Through Advocacy and Scholarly Engagement:** Librarians must proactively engage in advocacy both within and beyond their institutions. Publishing research, presenting papers at conferences, participating in national and international library organizations, and contributing to broader discussions about higher education policy can all enhance the visibility and perceived authority of university librarians. By positioning themselves as thought leaders and innovators, rather than passive service providers, librarians can challenge outdated perceptions and assert a more powerful role in shaping institutional futures.

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Institutional Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict

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