

Mentoring and its Impact on the Publication Output of Librarians in Selected Academic Libraries in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the possible role of mentoring in explaining the publication output of librarians in selected academic libraries. The paper sought to find out the number of papers that the academic librarians published annually, whether they are required to publish the same number of papers for promotion to particular grades as required of mainstream academics in their universities, whether they had mentors, and their perceptions of the impact of mentoring on their publication output. Data were collected from 66 academic librarians in four purposively selected universities in South-West Nigeria. Mentoring was perceived by the librarians to have a positive impact on their publication output, and that the major constraints on their publication efforts were their routine jobs and inability to conceptualise research topics. The study recommends that upcoming academic librarians should have mentors and collaborate with their senior colleagues until they are able to acquire the necessary skills to conceptualize research and publish quality papers. They should also transfer some of their routine duties to para-professionals in their libraries in order to be able to concentrate more on research-related activities such as reading extensively other peoples' works.

Introduction

Research is an important component in the growth and development of academics in general. The decision in the Nigerian university system to accord librarians in academic libraries academic status brought along with it the requirement of them to publish in reputable journals. Ekoja and Oji (1999) averred that the attainment of faculty status by the academic librarians carries with it such responsibilities as teaching, research and publications. As Odusanya and Amusa (2006) also noted, academic librarians are expected to publish extensively in both local and foreign journals and other outlets in order to merit promotion, notwithstanding any remarkable performances on the other criteria for promotion. This is not peculiar to academic librarians in Africa as, for instance, Kuyper-Rushing (2001) had stated that the Louisiana State University has rigorous tenure and promotion guidelines, and that librarians must meet these expectations just as the teaching faculty does.

Accordingly, along with the grant of academic recognition for academic librarians came the albatross of publish or perish. Oduwale and Adediji (2006) observed that all universities and research institutes in Nigeria consider scholarly publication as a prerequisite to promotion and career development of their academics. This has made librarians, especially those young and desirous of progress in their careers, to be running from pillar to post in order to publish high quality articles in reputable journals. One of the possible ways to facilitate this and cushion the associated stress, especially among those new in the academic librarianship field, is through the instrumentality of mentoring. Young academic librarians can seek or be paired either formally or informally with more senior people in the profession in order to learn and master the research terrain.

Research Problem and Objectives

The requirement that academic librarians publish in reputable journals, and simultaneously also meet up with the demands of their routine jobs in order to be promoted, has left many of them in a fix. Academic librarians, especially those young in the profession, find it difficult to write publishable articles which in turn leaves them stagnated and frustrated in particular positions in their libraries. This study therefore sought to investigate the challenges that the librarians face and the potential influence of mentoring in improving their publication output. Accordingly, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Find out whether academic librarians are required to publish the same number of papers for promotion to particular grades as required of teaching academics.
2. Determine the number of papers that the academic librarians publish annually.
3. Investigate the kind of journals the librarians publish in.
4. Ascertain if the librarians have mentors and the possible impact of mentoring on their publication output.
5. Investigate the constraints on the publication output of the librarians.
6. Recommend strategies for tackling the challenges that the librarians face.

Literature Review

Previous studies in Nigeria have revealed that the publication output of librarians is low. Ogbomo (2010) lamented that despite the benefits of publications to librarians, their publication output is low partly because the requirement to publish is an entirely new one for librarians in Nigeria. She further stated that in the past, librarians had only three requirements for promotion which are two to four years work since the last promotion, availability of vacancies and satisfactory performance. This however is no longer the case as scholarship has been introduced as one of the major criteria for promotion, and this has left many librarians stranded in positions and influenced their career development adversely. Powell, Baker and Mika (2002) and Utulu (2005) adduced the low publication output of librarians to lack of training which hinders the acquisition of adequate research and writing skills and identification of research problems and topics. Oduwole and Adediji (2006) proposed that library and information science (LIS) professionals need to acquire skills in researching and reporting usable research findings, and that honing these skills would help in the production of quality papers, as well as promoting their careers and LIS research.

Engaging in research and publishing the output of same is highly beneficial to librarians. This, according to Gregory and Medford (2006), is because it allows them to maintain their faculty status, obtain promotions and avail them the opportunity of adding to the body of knowledge. Verzosa (2007) also believes that it is very important for librarians to engage in research, as this will add value to librarianship. She however lamented that research in librarianship, particularly in the Philippines, is disappointing, and that although there is abundance of well educated, well trained library professionals, there is an unfortunate shortage of research-oriented librarians. In contrast to Verzosa's findings, Bahr and Zemon (2000) opined that academic librarians in the Western countries publish a lot.

Mentoring, as perceived by Igbokwe (2006), is a supportive one-on-one relationship between an accomplished individual and an aspiring individual to facilitate the aspirant's growth and development. Lary (1998) described mentoring as a professionally supportive relationship between an experienced, successful, mid-career employee and a beginner. She further opined that it is a time honoured method of encouraging new talent, and of sharing expertise and connections towards promoting rapid, upward mobility. Commenting on the role of mentoring and mentors, Carson (1992) avers that no one is truly self-made, but that people give their best so that others could learn to give their best.

Mentoring relationships in academics can either be formally or informally contracted. Odusanya and Amusa (2006) described informal mentoring relationship as one that develops on its own between partners, while the formal mentoring are administratively assigned relationships. Roberts (1986), writing on mentoring in the academic library, described the mentoring relationship as one that allows new people

to observe organisational and unit activities, functions, goals, policies and procedures through consultation with experienced professionals.

Harway (2001), citing Kram (1983), described the process of becoming involved in a mentor-mentee relationship as consisting of four phases. Initiation is the first phase which she described as a scenario where mentor and mentee select each other and begin to learn about the other's style and habits. The second phase is cultivation, which leads to increases in mentoring behaviours and the development of a strong relationship between mentor and mentee. The third phase of redefinition occurs when the mentoring relationship changes into what more closely resembles a peer relationship. The final phase, separation, is when the mentoring relationship ends, often as a result of geographic separation. A mentor's role involves providing support and resources to his/her mentee. He/she is also expected to facilitate a supportive and developmental relationship with the mentee.

Mentoring is beneficial both to the mentor and the mentee. Eby (2007) listed learning, developing personal relationships and enhancing managerial skills as some of the benefits of mentoring to the mentor. Farnes (2003) also highlighted the following as benefits of mentoring to both parties:

Mentee benefits:

- It aids induction into a new job culture.
- It helps in the process of understanding formal and informal structures of the organisation.
- It helps with developing skills in a structured way based on individual needs.
- It improves professional and personal networks.
- It provides an opportunity for a new member of staff to reflect on his/her own progress and resolve his/her own problems.

Mentor benefits:

- It broadens his/her own skills and knowledge.
- It brings new insight into the organisation.
- It enables him/her to demonstrate additional skills in developing other individuals.
- It consolidates and extends his/her professional networks.

Despite these important benefits of mentoring to the mentor and mentee alike, there are however some pitfalls associated with mentoring in academics which Odusanya and Amusa (2006) identified as absence of academic culture, issues bordering on integrity or distrust in the mentoring relationship, paucity of mentors and non-conducive work environments. For an individual to be adjudged to be a good mentor, he/she must possess the following characteristics as outlined by Free Management Library (2010):

- A desire to help.
- Positive experiences to share.
- A good reputation for developing others.
- Time and mental energy to devote to the relationship.
- Up-to-date knowledge.
- Learning attitude.
- Effective mentoring skills.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method was used in the study. Four universities were randomly selected from three states selected purposively out the six states in South-West Nigeria. The universities were: Covenant

University (private university, Ogun State) and Tai-Solarin University of Education (public university, Ogun State); University of Lagos (first generation public university, Lagos State), and Nigeria's oldest university, the University of Ibadan (public university, Oyo State). Two universities were chosen from Ogun State because it has the highest number of universities in the South-West region. A total of 66 librarians in the four academic libraries participated in the study. In each of the four universities, librarians from the status of Assistant Librarian who have worked for three (3) years and above and who were present as at the time of this study were used as respondents. A total of 88 librarians across the four academic libraries were contacted to participate in the study, and 22 (25%) failed and/or declined to return the questionnaire.

A questionnaire was designed and self-administered by the sampled librarians to collect data during May to June 2010. Out of the 88 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the librarians, 66 (75%) were duly completed, retrieved and used for the analysis. Table 1 provides the distribution and returns of copies of the questionnaire by university.

Table 1: Distribution and Returns of Questionnaire by University

University	(a) Copies distributed	(b) % of copies distributed (a)/88	(c) Copies retrieved	(d) Response rate [(c)/(a) * 100]
University of Lagos (UNILAG)	25	28	18	72.0
Covenant University (CU)	11	13	11	100.0
University of Ibadan (UI)	30	34	20	66.7
Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUE)	22	25	17	77.2
Total	88	100	66	75.0

Almost two-thirds (62%) of the 66 sampled librarians were female. In terms of their qualifications, 18% of them had BLS degrees; 73% had MLS degrees and 9% had doctoral degrees. Table 2 provides their work experience and status characteristics, which indicate that most of them (67%) were in the lower to mid-level positions of Librarian II, Librarian I and Senior Librarian.

Table 2: Work Experience and Status of the Respondents

Work experience	Frequency	%	Status	Frequency	%
1-3 years	10	15	Assistant Librarian	08	12
4-6 years	15	23	Librarian II	17	26
7-9years	28	42	Librarian I	15	23
10 years or more	13	20	Senior Librarian	12	18
			Principal Librarian	10	15
			Deputy University Librarian	04	06
Total	66	100	Total	66	100

Data Analyses and Findings

Quantity of Publication Output Expected of Academic Librarians

All the sampled librarians affirmed that they were expected to publish the same number of papers as other academics. This confirms that, compared to academics in university faculties, the librarians were or at least did not perceive themselves as enjoying any favour in terms of the quantities of publication output required for promotion to various grades.

Papers Published

Table 3 shows the publication output reported by the respondents per year and in total in their career. From the table, almost three-quarters (73%) of the respondents were publishing one or two papers per year, and only 12% published more than 3 papers per year. Also, the respondents with total publications of between six and nine were almost two-fifths (38%). This shows that, at least in terms of quantity of publications, the sampled librarians were doing quite well.

Table 3: Number of papers Published in a year and Overall

Papers per year	Frequency	%	Total publications	Frequency	%
1	28	43	0-2	18	27
2	20	30	3-5	15	23
3	10	15	6-9	25	38
> 3	08	12	> 9	08	12
Total	66	100	Total	66	100

Table 4 shows the types of journals in which the respondents published. Almost all the respondents had published in local journals– all the respondents from University of Lagos and Covenant University had published in local journals while 90% and 88% of the respondents from University of Ibadan and Tai Solarin University of Education had published in such journals, respectively. Also, between 82 and 85 per cent of the respondents from University of Lagos, Covenant University and University of Ibadan had published in international journals while only 53% of those from Tai Solarin University of Education had done so. Slightly more of the respondents had published in academic journals than in professional journals. Only one respondent each from University of Lagos and University of Ibadan claimed to have published in high impact journals.

Table 4: Types of journals where Respondents Publish

Type of Journal	University of Lagos		Covenant University		University of Ibadan		Tai Solarin University of Education	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Local	18	100	11	100	18	90	15	88
International	15	83	9	82	17	85	9	53
High Impact	1	6	-	-	1	5	-	-
Professional	15	83	5	45	18	90	7	41
Academic	15	83	7	64	18	90	14	82
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Percentages are proportions of respondents from each university who published in each type of journal.

Barriers to Research and Publication Output

The respondents were asked to specify the barriers that limit their efforts to improve the quantity and quality of their research output. Table 6, which summarises their responses, shows that four barriers were mentioned. The routine nature of their job tasks was the most frequently mentioned barrier, mentioned by all the respondents from Covenant University and Tai Solarin University of Education, as well as 89% and 85% of the respondents from University of Lagos and University of Ibadan, respectively (Table 5). The second most frequently mentioned barrier was inability to conceptualise research topics, mentioned by between 56 and 64 per cent of the respondents from the four universities, and the third barrier was frustration arising from rejection of articles submitted for publication.

Table 5: Barriers to effective Research Output of Respondents

Barriers	University of Lagos		Covenant University		University of Ibadan		Tai Solarin University of Education	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Inadequate research skill	06	33	04	36	7	35	07	41
Routine jobs of librarians	16	89	11	100	17	85	17	100
Inability to conceptualize research topics	10	56	07	64	11	55	10	59
Frustration arising from unacceptability of articles for publication	08	44	03	27	07	35	11	65
Others	02	11	-	-	-	-	01	06

Percentages are proportions of respondents from each university who mentioned each barrier.

Impact of Mentor-Mentee Relationships

When respondents were asked if they had mentors, Tai Solarin University of Education (all respondents), University of Ibadan (75%), Covenant University (81%) and University of Lagos (88%) agreed they had mentors. Table 6 also shows that most of the respondents agreed that their mentor-mentee relationships had helped in different ways to ameliorate the barriers to improved research output, with 83% (University of Lagos), 82% (Covenant University), 80% (University of Ibadan) and 65% (Tai Solarin University of Education) of the respondents affirming.

Table 6: Impact of Mentor-Mentee Relationship on Research Output

Impact of mentoring relationships	University of Lagos		Covenant University		University of Ibadan		Tai Solarin University of Education	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
It has sharpened my research skills	9	50	8	73	6	30	7	41
I can now conceptualize research topics	16	89	9	82	13	65	11	65
It has helped me to publish articles in reputable journals	15	83	9	82	16	80	11	65
There is no improvement in my research abilities	0	0	0	0	7	35	3	18
Undecided	3	17	2	18	4	20	1	6

Percentages are proportions of respondents from each university who mentioned each barrier

Discussion

The routine job tasks that academic librarians often have to perform were identified as biggest barrier to their publication output. Such routine tasks are performed either because the professional librarians do not or cannot delegate the tasks adequately to para-professionals, or that there are insufficient para-professionals to delegate to. Research work usually demands quality time, often in seclusion, to read widely and think deeply about research topics and projects. In the context of the finding on the adverse role of routine tasks, it is clear that academic librarians need to recognise and pay adequate attention to their intellectual roles in the academic environments where they work, delegate effectively to their subordinates and/or push for the adequate staffing of their libraries at the lower levels, and devote more time on their research tasks.

Almost all the 66 sampled librarians published in local journals, and much fewer published in international journals, and only two reported publishing in high impact journals. One reason for this is that international journals and high impact journals, in particular, demand papers of very high quality which the librarians are unable to meet. A related finding of this study is that as many as 65% and 44% of respondents in two of the universities mentioned their frustration arising from unacceptability of their papers by journals as a barrier to their publication output (Table 5). This is where mentoring and collaborative research between young librarians who are ready to learn and experienced librarians who are ready to share their knowledge is required. The librarians sampled in this study reported respectable total and annual numbers of publications. Also, 86% of the librarians confirmed having had mentors while about 75% of them affirmed that mentoring has developed their abilities to conceptualize research topics and publish articles in reputable journals (Table 6). These findings, when taken together, suggest that mentoring most likely played a crucial role in the respectable publication output profile reported by the librarians.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Scholarship is one of the criteria used for promoting librarians in academic libraries. In order to be at par with the academics in the faculties, they must have articles published in reputable journals. The paper studied the impact of mentoring on the publication output of librarians in academic libraries on some Nigerian universities. Results confirm that mentoring had a positive impact on the publication output of librarians in all the institutions.

By way of recommendations, academic librarians in Nigeria should seek ways to reduce the amount of the routine tasks they perform in their libraries. Para-professionals should be engaged and assigned to undertake some of these routine jobs in order to free the professional librarians to concentrate more on intellectual tasks. Also, librarians should cultivate the habit of reading extensively other peoples' works so as to be able to conceptualise research topics and build their capacity to write scholarly papers. Upcoming professionals should seek and engage in collaborative research with their senior colleagues in order to acquire and hone their research skills.

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