

INFLUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT ON RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

IWU-JAMES, J.

**Department of Information Resources Management,
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State.
iwu-james0389@pg.babcock.edu.ng**

&

HALISO, Y. L.

**Department of Information Resources Management,
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State.
halisoy@babcock.edu.ng**

&

SOYEMI, O. D.

**Department of Information Resources Management,
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State.
soyemio@babcock.edu.ng**

&

MADUKOMA, E.

**Department of Information Resources Management,
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State.
madukomae@babcock.edu.ng**

Abstract

Institutions that want to maximize the research effectiveness of academic staff in terms of research output must provide the necessary support and enabling environment in which research can flourish. Academic librarians need institutional support in order to succeed in their research. Therefore, the paper examined the influence of institutional support on research productivity of academic librarians in south-west, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design using a self-designed questionnaire to collect data from three hundred and twenty-six academic librarians. The study found that academic librarians were not satisfied with the institutional support provided by their institutions. Majority of the librarians studied were responsible for funding their research expenses. The study also revealed that bureaucratic bottlenecks were considered a major hindrance to the librarians' access to institutional support. Also, the study found that the top three forms of support librarians consider likely to influence their research productivity were payment of article publication fees followed by sponsorship to attend conference either within or outside the country and stipend to conduct research. The study concluded that University management should place stronger emphasis on supporting academic librarian research. The study recommended that governments and policymakers should prioritize research funding in universities.

Keywords: Institutional support, academic librarians, research productivity and academic libraries

Introduction

Research is a systematic analysis to uncover new facts or to gain further information needed to explain and resolve a specific problem. It is investigation undertaken for the creation and advancement of knowledge using verifiable facts, it is the engine that fuels development. Changes that led to civilization in different areas of human existence have been propelled by curiosity of avid and inquisitive scholars who dared to conduct research. It is critical in promoting prosperity and well-being of citizens in communities and the world at large. Research productivity (RP) is the measure of an academics' achievement, mostly in terms of the quantity and quality of publications over a given period. To put it simply, research productivity is the number of publications per researcher over a given period. Research productivity is a production process involving physical, tangible, intangible resource processes. The output of research production may be both tangible and intangible.

Typically, the main goal of research is creation of new knowledge and or insight which can be applied. Research productivity therefore, is a robust measure of academic achievement and recognition among peers. Globally, research productivity is very significant for universities, it is a central task and a key feature of universities. It is the next most valued aspect of academic tasks after teaching (Acord & Harley, 2013). It is one of the main objectives of universities, which reflects their competitive edge and prestige. It also represents a major indicator used to place institutions on the ivy-league table of world ranking universities. There has been increasing emphasis on research productivity around the globe and across various academic disciplines and institutions.

Noting the important role research productivity plays in the academia, the need to highlight metrics for its measurement becomes germane. Research productivity can be measured in various ways ranging from the quantity, quality and a combination of both. Each measure has its benefit and drawback. Measuring quantity entails counting the sum of research output such as journal articles, conference papers, number of edited works, patents, books and book chapters, etc. produced over a stipulated time frame. It used to be the most popular approach for measuring research productivity of researchers. However, academic librarians like other academics, are increasingly required to show their productivity in terms of quality (Schimanski, & Alperin, 2018). The quality of a research publication can be measured in many ways, some of which includes a consideration of the impact factor of the journal where a publication appears. The journals are often categorized into quality quartiles for instance Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 journals and many more (Kaba, 2020). Also, quality can be established by considering the author/article impact factor which can be measured using various indicators like h-Index, g-Index, i10-index, age-weighted citation ratio and many more (Ssematya, 2015).

Similarly, the quality of a research publication can also be measured by rating its inclusion in reputable and prestigious international databases of recognized indexing bodies such as Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, Pubmed, etc. (Altbach, 2015; Folk, 2014; Svein & Ingvild Reymert, 2017). Publications that are indexed by prestigious indexing bodies are considered to have higher scientific quality and greater chances of visibility as compared to non-indexed journals. Even though this is arguable, research outputs not listed in these databases are usually not considered relevant in the ever changing academic publishing landscape and are often underestimated.

Institutional support is payment of article processing charges (APC). These are charges that publishers use to cover the attendant costs of producing journals, peer review, hosting the journal online, archiving and many other related functions. The ability of authors to pay APC may play a considerable role in the decision of whether to publish in certain quality journals or not. Attaching monetary incentives to researchers with high quantity and quality research output is another form of support. There are universities in China and Russia that provide bonuses that doubles the salaries of faculty members in recognition of research productivity in recognized journals (Altbach, 2015). The process of conducting research directly or indirectly involves money and it will not be easy for academic staff who complain about their meagre salaries to use

their monies to conduct research. Under these circumstances, Havener and Stolt (1994) reported a positive correlation between research productivity and financial incentives. They discovered that those who received financial support performed significantly better in research and had a higher publication output. Reward is another form of support; it is anything that is given or received in response or recompense for performing meritorious work/service in an institution. The essence of rewards is to boost morale of the academic librarians and induce behaviour that is expected to enhance their research productivity.

Furthermore, technological support is another form of institutional support, it includes the provision of ICT infrastructure: hardware or software (statistical analysis software (such as SAS or SPSS) software, reference management software, antivirus), free /subsidized internet access, cloud storage infrastructure. Support in this regard will ensure that the academic librarian is not stranded at any stage of research. Similarly, regular attendance of academic conferences, workshops and trainings improves the research experience of academic librarians' and increases their network with expert researchers and scientists. At academic and professional conferences, a researcher could gain valuable experience in research writing, presentation and dissemination. Barnes and Beaulieu (2017) measured the impact of a national science foundation's annual conference attendance on research productivity of some women and found that women who attended the conference had higher average journal article submissions per year than women who did not. Institutions may support academic librarians' participation at conferences by making funds available to assist them cover the cost of attending local, national or international academic conferences, workshops or trainings.

Most African universities are instruction-focused, with little financial and institutional support for research (Kirkland & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013; Mashaah et al., 2014). Complains about inadequate funding in Nigerian universities is not a new issue. It is part of the reasons why the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was set up; to combat this problem by providing funds to all public tertiary institutions. Okojie (2009) revealed that TETFund provides an annual intervention of ₦20m (US\$63,391.60) to public universities to support them in many areas including research. To this end, the Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) implemented a policy that mandated all universities in Nigeria to create research offices with responsibilities for increasing access to and efficient management of external funding as part of a resolve to improve research and innovation management practices in Nigerian universities (Okonji, Okiki, Idowu & Alo, 2018). With this arrangement, it is expedient to know whether academic librarians have been able to access the forms of support available at their various institutions. The private universities are however not covered under TETFUND.

In Nigeria, institutional support services are available in universities at varying levels across different categories of institutions (National Centre for Technology Management & the Global Development Network, 2020). However, some scholars have revealed that librarians are facing uneven access to institutional support especially in terms of research funding and sabbaticals. According to them, librarians' research are often undervalued and unsupported and they do not enjoy comparable support as compared to other academic staff in the same university (Jacobs & Berg, 2013; Wyss, 2010). From South-East Nigeria, Ibegbulam and Jacintha (2016) discovered from their survey that the academic librarians were dissatisfied with the level of research support they were given. More so, there is need to know the specific support that effectively influences research productivity. The relevance of institutional support notwithstanding, there are few current studies that have examined institutional support of academic librarians in Nigeria. Not much attention has been paid in literature to the research support of librarians in Nigeria.

The area of this study is the South-West region of Nigeria which comprises six (6) states to include Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti. A significant portion of Nigeria's universities are in the South-West. This is the area where there are a large number of first generation universities (public and private). It is also the region of the country's leading public and private universities. The research productivity of academic librarians in South-West Nigeria has been described by many scholars as low, unstable and fluctuating (Ani, Ngulube & Onyancha, 2017; Okeji, 2018; Simisaye, 2019). Okonedo (2015) conducted a study involving

academic librarians at universities in the South-West and found that there were academic librarians who had had no publication in a whole year.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Ascertain the perception of academic librarian on the institutional support in South-West, Nigeria.
2. identify the forms of institutional support that will most influence the research productivity of academic librarians in South-West Nigeria

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Based on the importance of research productivity for universities' reputation and oftentimes, ranking, many universities regularly review the quantity and quality of scholarly publications required for appointment and promotion of academics with each review more stringent than the previous. To this end, academic librarians, like every other academic, must either publish or perish or better still, publish and flourish. The situation, however, is not reflective of flourishing. A study by Okonedo (2015) shows that there were academic librarians from the South-West region without a single publication to show in a whole year. Furthermore, a number of scholars have also described the research productivity of librarians as low, unstable and fluctuating (Ani, Ngulube & Onyancha, 2017; Okeji, 2018; Popoola, 2012). Consequently, such librarians would be unable to meet up with the requirements for promotion. Hence, career stagnation, career dissatisfaction and turnover intentions become an inevitable end. Relatedly, the growing emphasis on quality of publication and not just quantity prompts the need for investigation. Whether academic librarians' research productivity would experience a boost could be influenced by their institutional support.

Arguably, collaboration in research is considered to be immensely instrumental in improving the Also, researchers that have succeeded in their research endeavours have experienced some form of institutional support (Falola, Oludayo, Akinnusi, Osibanjo, & Salau, 2018). Hence, there is need to find out whether academic librarians research receives the necessary support.

Sequel to the aforementioned submissions, this study seeks to investigate the nexus among institutional support on research productivity of academic librarians in South-West Nigeria.

Methodology

The study used a survey research design. Academic librarians from both public and private universities in South-West region of Nigeria made up the study's population. There was no need for sampling as total enumeration was used. It was chosen to ensure that all academic librarians in the area were sufficiently covered. A self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data for the purpose of this research. The questionnaire was designed based on a thorough analysis of the literature and in accordance with the previously stated objective.

Three hundred and seventy-one (371) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to Librarians across the universities in South-West Nigeria. Three hundred and twenty-six (326) copies of the questionnaire were recovered and used for the analysis. This implies a response rate of 84.7% was sufficient for drawing empirical inferences on the influence of collaboration, ICT skills, and institutional support on academic librarians' research productivity in South-West Nigeria.

Table 1. what is the perception of academic librarian on the institutional support in South-West, Nigeria?

S/no	Librarians Perception of IS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	I am not aware of the forms of institutional support available in my university	36 (11.0)	53 (16.3)	112 (34.4)	125 (39.3)	2.00	1.00
2	I have been solely responsible for sponsoring my research expenses.	154 (47.2)	121 (37.1)	29 (8.9)	22 (6.7)	3.25	0.88
3	Institutional support is available and I have tried to access it.	21 (6.4)	21 (6.4)	179 (54.9)	105 (32.2)	1.87	0.79
4	Institutional support is available, but I feel I will face discrimination in my bid to access it.	48 (13.7)	112 (34.4)	120 (37.8)	46 (14.1)	2.51	0.91
5	There are no bureaucratic bottle-necks involved in accessing institutional support in my institution	32 (9.8)	73 (22.4)	147 (45.1)	74 (22.7)	2.19	0.90
6	Other Faculty (non-librarians) access research to support more easily than academic librarians.	55 (16.9)	71 (21.8)	151 (46.3)	49 (15.0)	2.40	0.94
7	I am satisfied with my institutions' support for academic librarians' research.	37 (11.3)	81 (24.8)	140 (42.9)	68 (20.9)	2.27	0.92
8	Research support will encourage me to be more productive in my research endeavours.	189 (58.0)	108 (33.1)	18 (5.5)	11 (3.4)	3.46	0.75
9	The forms institutional support provided by my university is inadequate	89 (27.3)	135 (41.4)	60 (18.4)	42 (12.9)	2.83	0.97
10	I have enjoyed research support (grants, seed funding etc.) from other sources outside my institution	55 (16.9)	71 (21.8)	127 (39.0)	73 (22.4)	2.33	1.01

SA= Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree . Source: Field survey, 2021

Decision rule for Table 1 using mean as the measure

1– 1.75:	Strongly Disagreed
1.76 – 2.51:	Disagree
2.52 – 3.26:	Agree
3.27 – 4.00:	Strongly Agree

Findings from Table 1 revealed that the respondents are aware of the forms of institutional support available in their institutions (mean = 2.0, Std. Dev. = 1). The respondents strongly agreed that they have been solely responsible for sponsoring their research expenses (mean = 3.25, Std. Dev. = 0.88). This confirms the findings of Akpan, Archibong, and Undie (2016) whose study revealed that self-funding was the major source of research funding by academic staff in Nigerian Universities. It is also consistent with the findings of Baro, Bosah and Obi (2017) who reported that a large number of the academic staff members in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria fund their research themselves from their meager salaries. Similarly, it is also in agreement with the findings by Okoduwa, Abe, Samuel, Chris, Oladimej, Idowu, and Okoduwa (2018). Also, the result reveals that institutional support is available but academic librarians have not tried to access it going by the mean score of 1.87 and standard deviation of 0.89. Furthermore, the result showed that majority of the respondents perceive that they will face discrimination in their bid to access institutional support judging by the mean score of 2.51 and standard deviation of 0.91. In addition, the respondents reveal that there are bureaucratic bottle-necks involved in the quest to access institutional support (mean = 2.19, Std. Dev. = 0.90). This shows that the respondents believe that there are institutional obstacles that could hinder their access to IS. This finding conforms with the findings by Baro, Bosah and Obi (2017) who reported that a large number of the academic staff in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are discouraged from accessing research support as a result of stringent conditions attached to research grants.

When asked whether other faculty (non-Librarians) are accessing institutional support more than librarians, the respondents disagreed (mean = 2.40, Std. Dev. = 0.94). Also, when queried on whether the respondents are satisfied with their institutions' support, the result reveal that the respondents disagreed (mean = 2.27, Std. Dev. 0.92). Which affirms their dissatisfaction with their institutions support. When asked whether institutional support will encourage them to be more productive in their research endeavours, the respondents agreed that it would, going by the mean score of 3.46 and standard deviation of 0.75. The respondents agreed that the forms institutional support provided in their institution is inadequate (mean = 2.83, Std. Dev. 0.97). The study also wanted to find out whether academic librarians have accessed research support (grants, seed funding etc.) from other sources outside their institutions and the results show that the academic librarians disagreed (mean=2.33, Std. Dev. = 1.01). This is consistent with the findings of Baro, Bosah and Obi (2017) who found that only a few academic staff members in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria have received research grants for research work outside their institution.

Table 2: What are the forms of institutional support that will most influence the research productivity of academic librarians in South-West Nigeria such that if it is increased, their research productivity would increase?

	Types of Support	EL	L	UL	EU	Mean	SD
1	Open recognition of research	106 (32.5)	175 (53.7)	21 (6.4)	24 (7.4)	3.11	0.82
2	Award	104 (31.9)	171 (52.5)	27 (7.7)	26 (8.0)	3.08	0.84
3	Availability of research assistant	96 (29.4)	179 (54.9)	27 (8.3)	24 (7.4)	3.06	0.82
4	Accelerated promotions	163 (50.0)	128 (39.3)	19 (5.8)	16 (4.9)	3.34	0.80
5	Stipend to conduct research	191 (58.6)	112 (34.4)	6 (1.8)	17 (5.2)	3.46	0.77
6	Sponsorship to attend conferences in Nigeria or outside the country	204 (62.6)	94 (28.8)	9 (2.8)	19 (5.8)	3.48	0.81
7	Payment of article publication fees for the scholarly paper	214 (65.6)	86 (26.4)	12 (3.7)	14 (4.3)	3.53	0.76
8	Research leave allowance	183 (56.1)	103 (31.6)	15 (4.6)	25 (7.7)	3.36	0.89
9	Study leave research or Sabbatical leave	192 (58.9)	105 (32.2)	9 (2.8)	20 (6.1)	3.44	0.82
10	Technology Support	190 (58.3)	109 (33.4)	12 (3.7)	15 (4.6)	3.45	0.77
11	Provision of personal computers for research	179 (54.9)	108 (33.1)	16 (4.9)	23 (7.1)	3.36	0.87
12	Sponsorship of research skills related workshop	172 (52.8)	120 (36.8)	16 (4.9)	18 (5.5)	3.37	0.81
Average Mean						3.34	

EL= Extremely Likely; L = Likely ; U = Unlikely; EU = Extremely Unlikely Source: Field survey, 2021

Decision rule for Table 2 using mean as the measure

1– 1.75:	Strongly Disagreed
1.76 – 2.51:	Disagree
2.52 – 3.26:	Agree
3.27 – 4.00:	Strongly Agree

The study found that the topmost three (3) forms of institutional support which academic librarians perceive will most likely influence their research productivity are: payment of article publication fees (3.53, std. = 0.76), followed by sponsorship to attend conference either within or outside the country (3.48, std. =0.81) and stipend to conduct research (3.46, std. = 0.77). It is also consistent with the findings of Okoduwa, Abe, Samuel, Chris, Oladimej, Idowu, and Okoduwa (2018) whose report found that 84% of researchers they studied reported lack of funds as a barrier hindering research activities and publishing of articles among them. Sponsorship to attend conference is very highly valued by researchers as observed by Barnes and Beaulieu (2017) whose findings showed that female academic who attended conferences produced more research than those who did not.

The finding also corroborates the report of Kennedy and Brancolini (2018) who found that travel funds for conferences and other means of professional growth were the two most frequently noted choices of support. Also Tisnawati and Effendi (2018) found that institutional support such as funding for attending seminars or scientific conferences largely influenced research the productivity of their respondents.

Conclusion

Even though institutional support is essential to the career advancement and job satisfaction of academic librarians, the study found that academic librarians perceive that their institutional support is inadequate and they were not satisfied with it. Academic librarians require adequate institutional support so as to boost their research efforts. It is essential for universities to pay adequate attention and make adequate provision for research support especially in terms of providing: article publication fees, sponsorship for conference attendance and stipend to conduct research since this study identified these factors as essential in boosting/improving the research productivity of academic librarians. It is expected that providing these forms of support will trigger more commitment in the academic librarians propelling them to increase their level of research productivity.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proffered as the way forward: Librarians should take steps to compete for the available resources just like their faculty counterparts. Personal effort is also required for obtaining research supports from outside one's institution as there are many research funding agencies both within and outside the shores of the country that are willing to give a variety of grants to researchers. Librarians need to be aware of those agencies and take necessary steps to take advantage of those outlets University management should provide opportunities for academic librarians to develop their research capacity by ensuring bureaucratic free access to research support in the universities. Stringent policy or bureaucratic bottle-necks involved in accessing institutional support should be reduced to the barest minimum so as to encourage librarians to apply for and access research support.

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