

Mentoring, Collaborative Researches and ICT Versatility as Influencing Factors on Research Productivity of LIS Educators in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper described the extent to which mentoring, collaborative researches and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) versatility could serve as influencing factors on research productivity of Library and Information Science (LIS) educators in Nigeria. One of the major determinants of profitability of the faculty including LIS educators is research productivity. While it is true that faculty members are expected to teach and carry out other responsibilities in the academia their research productivity remains a strong yardstick in determining their level of relevance. The research productivity of LIS educators would, under normal circumstances, receive a boost if there is cordial and fruitful mentoring among colleagues especially between the senior faculty and junior faculty. In this information driven age, LIS educators who are highly skilful in the use of ICT in information handling-accessing, collating, utilising and disseminating information would definitely be productive in terms of research productivity. With the limitless opportunities that the digital age has made possible, LIS educators who are properly mentored and who are active in knowledge collaboration coupled with ICT versatility would definitely be super productive in terms of research output. The paper concluded that mentoring is one of the major media of creating cordial and functional lasting relationship which, afterwards, influences the research productivity of LIS educators. It was recommended that mentoring programme in higher institutions of learning should be renewed and formalised to elicit the best from the mentors and mentees with a view of boosting the research productivity of both parties.

Keywords: Collaborative Researches; ICT Versatility; LIS Educators; Mentoring; Research Productivity.

Introduction

Organisations including institutions of higher learning and research institutes are expected to be highly productive. One of the physical indicators of productivity in institutions of higher learning is the research output of the faculty, including that of Library and Information Science (LIS) educators. In this information-driven and digital pronounced age, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) versatility which would engender processes such as: accessing, collating, sieving, utilising and disseminating of information

cannot be treated with levity. ICT versatility accentuates useful interaction, cross-fertilisation of ideas among LIS educators and consequently results in collaborative researches and enhanced research productivity. Research productivity would, however, receive a boost only when there is productive, meaningful, goal-setting, goal-achieving, mutual, symbiotic, proficient, profitable and mentoring. Mentoring that gets results is productive. Mentoring that does not leave the mentee in the same position but pushes him or her forward in a positive manner is productive. Mentoring that is able to deposit, transfer and transmit the laudable ideals, values, traits in the life of the mentor to the mentee without sacrificing standard can be aptly described as productive in manner. Where there is mentoring, collaborative researches and proficient ICT manpower, the research productivity of LIS educators would receive a boost.

The concept of research productivity as knowledge-based activity is aimed at enhancing the intellectual output of the members of faculty. The 21st century economy has transformed from industrial to knowledge-based economy. This means that as demand for information increases on daily basis, the need for productive researches by members of the faculty and other researchers, including LIS educators have equally received a boost. This is necessary in order to adequately manage and, of course, improve on the previous researches carried out. Information and Communication Technology has affected the way things are done including the approaches in research activities that are carried out for effective service delivery. Research activities and productivity have become indispensable factors for the career upliftment of the faculty overall development of academic and research institutes.

Research, according to Ocholla, Ocholla and Onyancha (2013), is defined as a way of finding answers to unknown or lesser known problems emerging from natural and artificial phenomena within an individual's environment through a systematic, logical and verifiable process. Cummings and Shin (2014) stated that research productivity at present has become a criterion in recruiting, offering tenure appointments and getting promotions in places of work in all institutions of higher learning, including research institutes. This is necessary to ensure that newly recruited academics will be productive academic researchers in future to serve the research goals of the universities and other allied research institutes. Research productivity according to Okenodo *et al* (2015) is often used interchangeably with publication output, production productivity, research output and sometimes knowledge production. It is therefore expressed by the entirety of researches conducted by the faculty including librarians in universities in their chosen career over a given period of time. Put succinctly, research output refers to those indicators of productivity which could be measured physically. It includes the number of articles published in referred journals; number of conferences/workshops attended; number of articles in conferences/workshop proceedings; chapters in books; number of books published amongst other factors. If there would be an upsurge in the research productivity of LIS educators, there is need for mentoring. Mentoring among individuals, especially among the LIS educators, is crucial to the success and development of Library and information Science education in Nigeria.

Salinitri (2005) highlighted that mentorship refers to a personal developmental relationship in which a mentor who is more experienced or more knowledgeable helps a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. In an ideal situation, the success of a mentoring relationship is borne out of the role of the mentor. This is because experts view mentorship as a nurturing process, which provides the opportunity for more experienced individuals to share their professional knowledge and expertise with others who are less experienced.

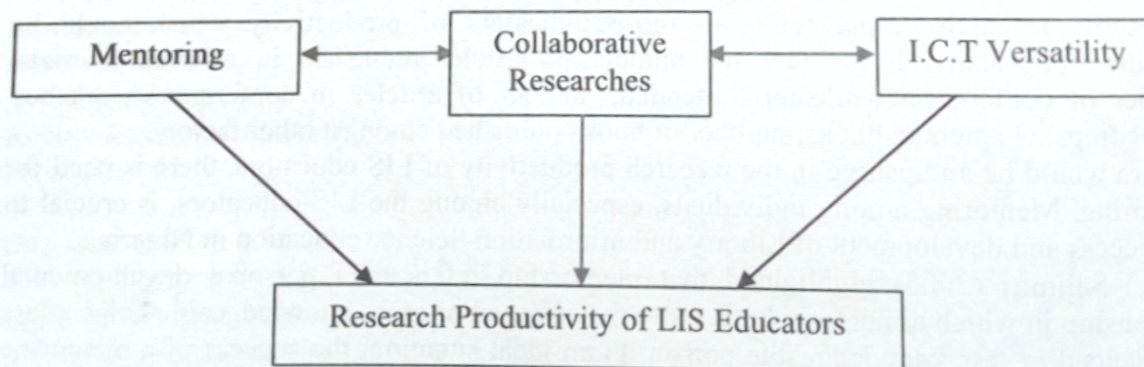
Consequently, mentoring is the process of harnessing experience and knowledge and sharing it with others. It is about people learning from each other and applying the knowledge acquired. It is a process where the mentor shares his positive ideals, ideas, values, knowledge, skills, know-how in a practical, productive and pragmatic manner to the mentees. For LIS educators and instructors, productive mentoring will bring about productive output especially when the mentoring is done properly. Mentoring will bring about collaborative researches which will come as a result of knowledge sharing among LIS educators.

Apart from mentoring, another important factor which could enhance the research productivity of LIS educators is collaboration. Collaboration in research, according to Wolff and Moses (2009), is considered a useful way of enhancing research productivity because it builds on and maintains relationship among academics and promotes goal achievements. Collaboration brings about knowledge sharing. Jallon (2010) considered research collaboration among academics as experiences of research socialization. Such experience is necessary especially for junior academics to share ideas and learn new knowledge from the senior academics through the processes of research collaboration. With proper mentoring and collaboration, the research productivity of LIS educators can be improved.

In this information driven age, research productivity of LIS educators would receive anticipated acceleration if they are properly mentored, and if there is collaboration among colleagues. But, more importantly, there would be a dramatic increase in their research productivity if they are apt, skilful and versatile in the use of ICT in information handling. Due to the changing nature of LIS practice in the digital era, there is need for LIS educators to depend on the current technology to function more effectively in the society. Issa *et al* (2015), in their study, concluded that sustainability and continuity of librarianship as a profession in this transition period and beyond would depend largely on effective training received by the trainees in line with the contemporary realities in the areas of ICT. Educators are now challenged to play key roles in the research output by encouraging mentoring with the junior academics, collaborative researches as well as enhancing their ICT skills in order to meet up with the exigencies and the challenges of the digital age.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for the study is an original construct of the researchers. The essence of the conceptual model is to explain how the variables are connected to each other as well as the flow among them as presented in the model below:



Source: Authors' Original Construct (2019)

Figure 1 is the conceptual model for the paper. It is evident from the diagram that mentoring, collaborative researches and ICT versatility could serve as influencing factors on research productivity of LIS educators. The arrows that are pointing both sides from mentoring to ICT versatility are indicative of the fact that there is a nexus, a corollary, connectivity and an inextricable interplay among mentoring, collaborative researches and ICT versatility. Mentoring would engender collaborative researches which if coupled with ICT versatility would cumulatively enhance the research productivity of LIS Educators.

How Mentoring, Collaborative Researches and ICT Versatility can Enhance Research Productivity of LIS Educators

It is pertinent to understand that research productivity is an important factor that requires crucial attention for effective LIS education and can be influenced through mentoring of the younger educators in order to be more effective in research activities. Mentoring can be through knowledge sharing, generating new ideas, sharing new discoveries, through knowledge sharing, and seeking opinions of younger staff. Isibor (2011) stated that mentoring is all about creating a culture that ensures development of intellectual productivity in an organisation. Individuals in effective mentoring relationship experience fewer adjustment problems; advance at a faster pace; are more productive; and are more responsible for the choices they make.

Katz and Martin (1997) opined that research collaboration is highly recommended because of its benefits. The specific benefits include the followings, amongst others.

1. Research collaboration enables researchers to share skills and techniques and is one way of transferring knowledge (especially tacit knowledge).
2. Through clashing views, collaboration may bring about cross-fertilisation of idea, which may in turn generate new insights or perceptives that individuals, working on their own, would not have grasped.
3. Collaboration provides intellectual companionship within a practicing community.
4. Collaboration plugs the researcher into wider contact network in the scientific community.
5. It enhances the visibility of the research work.

Mentoring is a serious business in academics because it makes one grow as well as helps one to learn from others since it involves cross-fertilisation of ideas. Mentoring is more or less inter-twined with collaborative research. Through mentoring, collaboration can take place and vice-versa. For instance, a senior academic, lecturer or faculty member can engage younger academics by mentoring him/her through coaching in lectures, paper writing, attending conferences, seminars and workshops; a student can also be mentored for him/her to become productive in research. Mentoring gives birth to research collaboration because through mentoring collaboration in research activities can take place. This is in line with the statement of Stone (2011) who asserted that mentoring is a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster the professional growth of someone else. Everyone has need for insight that is outside his/her normal life and educational experience. The power of mentoring is that it creates one-of-a-kind opportunity for collaboration, goal achievement and problem solving. There is a popular

saying in research that “he that is not engaged in research collaboration is not productive”. Therefore, with mentoring among LIS educators, collaboration would take place which will in turn result in qualitative research output (productivity).

With the changing nature of technology in the rapidly changing age one cannot hesitate in seeking more knowledge on the proficiency of ICT facilities/tools because as the change progresses, one also need to change with regards to the current trend. When LIS Educators become vaster and more proficient in the use of ICT tools regardless of their location, collaboration can take place because papers can be sent via the Internet to another location. This will enhance the tempo and quantity of researches carried out by the educators. This is not limited to LIS educators alone but including other areas too like Engineering, Medicine, Pharmacy, Architecture, Agriculture, etc.

Conclusion

The need for mentoring of LIS educators is borne out of the fact that it creates the most functional relationship which in turn guarantees the transfer of useful knowledge, skills and competence from senior academics to junior academics and vice versa. It has been observed that many junior academics secured jobs into tertiary institutions particularly library schools unprepared for the level of work due to inadequate knowledge of what research productivity is all about. Since mentoring provides an exceptional platform/way for senior LIS educators to inculcate, guide, train and nurture Junior LIS educators issues that border on mentoring, collaborative research with proficiency in ICT should not be toyed with if the research productivity of LIS educators will receive a boost.

Recommendations

In the light of the discussion in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be productive mentoring between the senior and junior LIS educators.
2. Collaboration in researches should be the norm among LIS educators.
3. Training and retraining of LIS educators in the use of ICT and other allied gadgets should be given the topmost priority in higher institutions of learning and other allied research institutes.

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