



# PROMOTING RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY AMONG LIBRARIANS: THE INTERVENING ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

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Received: 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020 Accepted: 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020 Date of Publication: December 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The paper x-rayed the benefits of research support to academic librarians. The paper recommended that institution that desires to harness the research productivity of the academic librarians' workforce must identify the factors that enhance research and also show commitment by providing such research support factors. The types of research support identified and discussed in this article include: different forms of leave/ time-out to pursue research; different forms of financial support /funding; support in terms of technological infrastructure / expertise, and assistance and training. This paper concludes that the provision of adequate research support will increase level of job satisfaction and reinforce loyalty to the institutions core values especially research, it will also lead to reduced truancy, absenteeism and much more.

**Approach:** the paper reviewed literature to reveal the various types of research support factors. The literature reviewed also provide evidence for the influence of research support on research output.

**Findings:** The paper showed that research support plays a key role in encouraging academic librarians for increased research output.

**Originality/Value:** This paper provided valuable insight into the varying types of support that may influence academic librarians' intentions to produce, increase and sustain more research output.

**Keywords:** research support; institutional support; research productivity; academic librarians

## Introduction

Research output is often a measure of an academic's achievement, mostly in terms of publications and it is beneficial not only to faculty but their affiliated institutions (Schroen, Thielen, Turrentine, Kron & Slingluff, 2012). For academic librarians, research has become a significant index or determinant of

their appointment, promotion / career advancement, reputation and academic acceptance. For them, like any other academic, it is either they publish or perish since they are increasingly being evaluated based on the quality and quantity of their publications (Czerniewicz & Goodier, 2014). For the universities, the quality and quantity of research output has become one of the most important

criteria for the global ranking of tertiary institutions. In view of the overall importance of research productivity to universities, more emphasis is often placed on it leading to periodical review of the quality and quantity of research required for promotion and advancement of staff (Brew, Boud, Namgung, Lucas & Crawford, 2016).

Research productivity is a priority for every tertiary institution globally (Cadez & Dimovski, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, prioritizing research remains a far cry in developing countries especially in Africa where the tertiary institutions have been behind their counterparts in developed countries in terms of the world ranking of tertiary institutions (Olugbode, 2017). Research productivity of African countries has been described as abysmally low, representing less than one percent of the world's research productivity. Specifically, Nigeria's research productivity is low based on Africa's output of publications indexed on Thomson Reuters Web of Science databases between 1999 and 2008 which reported that Nigeria's research output stood at only ten thousand (10, 000) publications despite having over one hundred and twenty-nine (129) universities apart from research and allied institutes, polytechnics and colleges of education. South Africa with 20 universities had a research output of about forty seven thousand (47, 000) publications, Egypt had thirty thousand (30,000) publications which is higher when compared to Nigeria (Fonn, Ayiro, Cotton, Habib, Mbithi, Mtenje & Ezech, 2018).

Several reasons have been proffered for this, but an unsupportive research climate is a crucial and prominent cause as noted by Onyancha (2009) who revealed that researchers in Nigeria have not received the requisite support for their research. Research support refers to the active assistance rendered by the management of an institution to its faculty to help them achieve their research objectives. It is a factor that is crucial and essential to bolster the zeal of academic librarians, it can act as a propeller to push academic librarians into sustaining and increasing their research output. 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. The private universities are however not covered under TETFUND.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Some studies have shown that a bulk of research emanating from Nigerian universities, over 80% has been self-funded by academic staff from salaries often described in literature as meager salaries (Akpochofo, 2009; Bako, 2005). It has also been revealed that even where support is provided and academic librarians are expected to be beneficiaries, there are cases of academic librarians facing uneven access to research support (Jacobs & Berg, 2013; Wyss, 2010). Similarly, Ibegbulam and Jacintha (2016) discovered from their survey that the academic librarians in Nigeria were dissatisfied with the level of research support they were given. The value of institutional support to researchers cannot be overemphasized, hence, there is need to understand the forms of support that may effectively influence research productivity of academic librarians' and increase awareness in that regard.

### **The role of Research Support**

Literature has shown that, where there is adequate institutional support, it stirs job satisfaction which will consequently lead to increased performance (Allen, Armstrong, Reid & Riemenschneider, 2008; DeConinck, 2010; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). Kahn (1990) found that employees who enjoy institutional support are more likely to connect and function adequately as required by their employers in more productive ways than those who feel less supported. More researchers have also reported that employees who are supported will also align their behavior by upholding the values of the organizations to reciprocate the benevolence from the institution (Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Ohana, 2016; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2017). Some scholars have reported that the productivity of employees can be influenced by their perception of their employers (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, Rhoades, 2001). Employees tend to form a perception about their organization based on support factors that the organization is willing to provide (Yilmaz &

Görmüş, 2012). Apart from forming a perception about their organization, Kelley (2010) submitted that when the employer provides a supportive climate, the employee may reciprocate by increasing the necessary positive engagement in-role performance behaviour that serves as an advantage to the organization.

Charles, Karen, Lisa, & Richard (2012) agree that responsive support is often effective and can encourage increased productivity of research. Providing research support services to faculty is a form of human capital investment with potential to impact the level of research productivity. Some scholars have shown a strong correlation between the extent of support provided to faculty and their research productivity. According to them, higher levels of institutional support result in a productive work environment (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009; Simmons, 2011). In addition, institutions that facilitate support for employees are usually appraised as having a competitive advantage over others that do not (Qehaja & Kutllovci, 2015; Zacher & Winter, 2011).

It has also been revealed that the productivity of staff depends on encouragements and motivations received within the organization. The right research incentives can stimulate research productivity. When faculty perceive that their institution supports them, they will improve performance, become much more committed to the organization and identify with and also help the organization succeed at achieving its corporate goals. Conversely, if employees perceive their organization does not support them or even mistreats them, it will most likely result in decline in productivity (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). Likewise, DeConinck (2010) has also shown that a lack of support will most likely result in decline in productivity.

### **Institutional Support Factors for Influencing Research Output**

Different scholars have proposed various broad and specific factors that could increase research output of academic librarians. However, the types of support as reported by Freedenthal, Potter & Grinstein-Weiss (2008) will be elaborated by this study. The authors' submitted that research support can be divided into four categories:

- different forms of leave/ time-out to pursue research
- different forms of financial support /funding
- technological infrastructure / expertise, and assistance and
- training

The workload of most academic librarians is made up of professional, administrative, research and teaching responsibilities which could conflict with their time for pursuing research. Despite these several roles or activities, promotion/ career advancement to a great extent depends on research output. Having a heavy technical and administrative workload has frequently been reported by many scholars as an impediment to research activities (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2011; Ito & Brotheridge, 2007; Jung, 2012). Apart from research, academic librarians are oftentimes expected to participate in teaching university wide courses like library instruction and information literacy. Also, academic librarians have other professional functions/roles such as cataloguing, classification, reference services, consultations, collection development, etc. These responsibilities leave them struggling with a heavy workload and less time for research engagements.

One of the possible means of creating more time for research activities is by offering the academic librarians different forms of leave. Many universities support their academics in their research endeavours by offering them some form of leave. These include study leave, research leave, sabbatical leave and others. Even though some institutions support their faculty through leaves, Wyss (2010) noticed that some librarians were usually exempted by certain clauses. Hemmings, Rushbrook and Smith (2007) also agree with the provision of leave to create adequate time for research productivity. According to them, academic librarians find it difficult to allot time for conducting research as there are other role requirements competing for same. This is confirmed by Walter (2016) who revealed that librarians do not frequently have access to advantages like sabbaticals and other forms of leave periods. Some scholars have suggested the reduction of administrative and technical duties for academic librarians to a considerable minimum so as to gain

enough time for them to engage in quality research, while others feel it is better to reduce the expectations in terms of number of output they should produce within a given period. Irrespective of either side of the argument, one thing is consistent in literature which is the fact that academic librarians also require more free time to engage in research (Hemmings et al., 2007).

Birx, Anderson-Fletcher and Whitney (2013) opined that developing and encouraging formal research cluster has numerous advantages. A research cluster is made up of researchers usually but not necessarily, from various disciplinary backgrounds having agreed to focus on a common research theme. They leverage and connect the unique expertise, skills and strengths of each team member, they share resources, and provide opportunities for faculty to take advantage of the interrelationship of research areas. Many universities support research by adopting the concept of research clusters. The formally recognized clusters are then provided a meeting place and the required funding to run the activities of the cluster. Study by Sweileh, Zyoud, Sawalha, Abu-Taha, Hussein and Al-Jabi (2013) reported that institutions that formalize research clusters are often perceived by faculty as very supportive and have also described formalization of research clusters as an effective strategy to improve research output.

Some scholars have warned that obtaining masters' and doctoral degrees is not enough to adequately prepare prospective academic faculty with all necessary skills for all research-related expectations in their academic research and teaching responsibilities (Pedrosa-de-Jesus, Guerra & Watts, 2017). Similarly, Demerouti (2014) faulted research methods courses taught in most Canadian library schools on the grounds that those courses were not enough to prepare librarians to undertake rigorous research when they enter the workforce of institutions with research expectations. Kennedy and Brancolini (2012) observed that one of the reasons librarians' research is undervalued may be their inadequate research skills and poor research design. Offering a way out, other researchers suggest that academic librarians can improve their research skills by attending physical or virtual workshops, short courses or tutorial trainings,

seminars and trainings especially targeted at librarians (Fields, Stamatakis, Duggan & Brownson, 2015; Behar-Horenstein, Garvan, Catalanotto, Su & Feng, 2016).

Similarly, Kennedy and Brancolini (2018) reported that librarians will be able to make up for the inadequacies and ill-preparation in library schools through workshops. They also proffer that conference attendance may enhance research skills as researchers will have the opportunity to learn from their peers during conferences. Workshops are deemed beneficial as they serve as a platform for professional development and honing research skills (Yarber, Brownson, Jacob & 2015). Also, attending conferences will improve research experience, increase opportunities for collaboration and networking. Institutions can support academic librarians by making funds available to assist researchers with the cost of attending national / international travel for conferences (Mauvais-Jarvis, 2016; Wyss, 2010).

Article Processing Charges (APC) also known as publication fees are charges by publishers that authors pay to cover the cost implications of peer review, production/ printing, free/ open access. Some journal publishers also require this fee in order to make their journal content open access and freely available online for others to easily access and reuse. Ajuwon and Ajuwon (2018) reported that many academic researchers in Nigeria, self-sponsor their research and such researchers find the payment of publication fees as an impediment to their research productivity. According to them, the ability of authors to pay publication fees play a considerable role in their decision whether to publish in certain journals.

Meanwhile, Harnard, (2010) has blamed the invisibility of much of the research done in Africa on the high financial cost of publishing as requested by some journals publishers. The author reported that many scientists in Africa cannot afford publication fees due to financial constraints. Some institutions have policies that spell out conditions for supporting research publications. Some of the conditions include: when the journal is open access, is indexed by reputable database, the outlet is high impact, when the corresponding author is affiliated with the institution, etc. Nevertheless, others still,

pay the publication fees without any conditions for eligibility. The requirement notwithstanding, literature reveal that many institutions support full or partial payment of publication fees for their faculty (Altbach, 2015).

Monetary incentives is another form of institutional support, linked to research productivity. This has been reported as a very significant predictor of research output. Balakrishnan (2013) reported that attaching monetary incentives to the level of research productivity of faculty, often increases performance. Monetary incentives contribute to making employees feel valued and appreciated, which will translate into increased effort towards greater performance. Some studies have shown a positive relationship between research incentives and research productivity. Those studies also report that monetary incentives plays a substantial role by motivating faculty members to engage in more research (Pfeffer & Langton 1993; Tornquist Gneezy, Meier & Rey-Biel, 2011). Additionally, Havener and Stolt (1994) discovered that those who received financial support performed significantly better in research and had a higher publication output.

Providing monetary incentive can influence faculty ability to increase and sustain research productivity especially as the issue of low salaries and untimely payment of workers in developing countries persist. Altbach (2015) reveal that there are many universities that offer monetary incentives to researchers, in recognition of their outstanding research outputs. The author reveal that some universities offer incentives that were equivalent of a monthly salary or even higher. Altbach (2015) cited cases of some highly rated universities in China and Russia that provide such incentive worth more than twice a monthly salary for publication in highly rated publishing outlets.

Technology support may be in the form of institutional IT staff who offer individualized research computing consultation for faculty so that faculty who are not intensive, traditional users of high-performance computing or digital technology may get help in using advanced technologies to support their research and scholarship. Technology support also includes installing software on faculty's laptop with software as a way of supporting the faculty research journey. The software may include

statistical analysis software (such as SAS or SPSS), labor-saving citation software (Mendeley, Endnote etc.).

ICT support also covers the provision of applications, tools and hardware to faculty in the institution. It also includes facilitating the use of cloud infrastructure. Such that academic librarians who are not proficient in ICT are provided with technical assistance from IT staff who will offer help in advanced technologies to support their research. Higher education in Nigeria is beset by various challenges which have the potential to affect the level of institutional support that institutions can provide their faculty. The problems that affect institutional support in Nigeria are often connected to budget cuts leading to low levels of research funding (Obinyan, Aidenojie, Ebunuwele & Amune, 2013)

### **Impediments to Accessing Institutional Support**

Bureaucracy may pose as a real brake in accessing institutional research support even when it exists. Bello (2012) identified bureaucracy as a major challenge that researchers face in accessing research funds in Nigeria. Where there are a number of documents to fill and physical visits to various offices that regulate institutional support, the processes and procedures can become a huge hindrance which could discourage researchers from seeking their desired supports. Excessive bureaucracy often leads to bottlenecks which can frustrate the academic and contribute to loss of interest in applying for supports. While it is important to have organizational structures in place to administer, manage, achieve efficiency and accountability. The process of accessing support should be effective and efficient with reduced bureaucracy.

Even where institutional support is available, Kempcke (2002) indicated that librarians often lack awareness of such support and are not taking advantage of them. This assertion is supported by Adesomoju (2008) who suggested that universities should be deliberate in the dissemination of information about the existence of research support and modalities for accessing these supports. Another factor which could pose a hindrance to librarians' access to institutional support is the non-possession of PhD degrees by some academic librarians. Baro, Fyneman and Zoukemefa (2013)

revealed that in many Nigerian universities, research support is easily accessed by professors and faculty who have PhD degrees. According to them, others who have not attained the position of professor or who do not have PhD are often denied support.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Any institution that desires to have a research active/productive workforce should be interested in identifying the factors that enhance success of research endeavours and also show commitment to its researchers by providing adequate research support factors. This paper advocates that universities should provide more support for librarians to enable them not only to conduct research but to increase and sustain it. Providing adequate research support bears numerous advantages which include: a positive perception of the institution by the academic librarians which will encourage interest in the core values of the institution, increase in the level of commitment towards the institution, increased level of job satisfaction and loyalty to their institution, reduced truancy and absenteeism and much more.

As far universities will continue to demand academic librarians to publish in order to achieve career advancement, supporting research should be a priority in the institutional budget. Universities management should remove some bureaucratic processes and procedures that could discourage faculty from accessing research support. Also, it is important for University management to be intentional about creating awareness about existing research support. There should be widespread information dissemination on campus detailing the availability of research support. Information regarding institutional research support should be on the universities' website. Finally, academic librarians should engage in research collaboration with colleagues and faculty outside the library especially those with higher degrees and ranks. In institutions where policy gives priority to faculty of higher ranks or qualification, research collaboration will enable academic librarians to enjoy the privileges accorded to such persons. It will also enable them meet meet standards and criteria to qualify for research support.

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