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Bridging the Great Divide: Librarian-faculty Collaboration in Selected Higher Institutions in Lagos State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines librarian-faculty collaboration in selected academic libraries in Lagos State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling method was used to select five out of a total population of nine higher institutions in Lagos State. Questionnaire was used as the major instrument for data gathering among librarians in the selected institutions. The study found that librarians are willing to collaborate with faculty in the areas of providing Current Awareness Services (CAS), working with accreditation teams, and helping to develop both the media and information literacy skills of students. The study also found that librarians believe that faculty board meetings and library committee initiatives are effective platforms for promoting librarian faculty collaboration. Further, the study identified essential skills for librarian-faculty collaboration. Overall, findings show that a weak negative correlation exists between gender and area of collaboration at $N = 38$, $r = -0.136$, $p < 0.05$. The survey also found a significant weak negative relationship between age and area of collaboration ($N = 38$, $r = -0.379$, $p < 0.05$). No significant relationship was found between work experience and area of collaboration ($r = -0.067$, $p = 0.696 > 0.05$). The study therefore suggests that stakeholders in higher education should imbibe the culture of expanding and strengthening collaboration between librarians and faculty.

Introduction

In most institutions of higher learning, little or no interaction tends to exist between librarians and faculty. These are academics who are lecturers in higher institutions of learning. Faculty are mostly unaware of what librarians do, as the majority see librarians as no more than book custodians and information service providers. In fact, librarians engage in research, publishing, administration and teaching. It has been suggested in the literature that faculty members hardly view librarians as their academic counterparts or as vital entities in the academic scenery (Nilsen, 2012). This great divide between librarians and faculty has been associated with a culture of seclusion among faculty (Christiansen, Stomblor, & Thaxton, 2004), especially in light of the perception that librarians only provide information services (Phelps & Campbell, 2012). A major for this image perversion is that many faculty have not felt the impact of librarians (Dorskatsch, 2003). To overcome this anomaly, Matthies (2004) suggests that academic libraries need to collaborate more actively with faculty.

Collaboration involves two or more people working together towards achieving common goals by sharing knowledge (Lomas, Burke, & Page, 2008). The responsibility for reinforcing collaborative initiatives between the library and faculty lies mainly with librarians. If the academic community must stop regarding librarians as mere service

providers, then it behoves librarians to take the profession beyond service provision (Nalani Meulemans & Carr, 2013). No doubt, one of the ways of achieving this is through partnering with faculty, i.e. all the academics or lecturers in various departments in the university. Most academic libraries have taken several initiatives to promote collaboration between librarians and faculty. For instance, in the United States of America, some academic libraries have integrated information literacy into the curriculum. Where collaboration between librarians and faculty exists, there is bound to be effective communication and interaction (Qobose, 2000), improved staff efficiency, cross-pollination of ideas and sharing of efforts (Carnwell & Carson, 2008).

In higher institutions of learning, librarian-faculty collaboration is an essential component of effective library instruction, collection development and development of information, as well as research literacy competency. Additionally, faculty becomes more conscious of the expertise and abilities of academic librarians (Ducas & Michaud-Oystryk, 2003). However, Winner (1998) argues that collaboration between librarians and faculty will be meaningful only when the interaction leads to incorporating the library into all components of curriculum planning. It has not been definitively established in the literature that academic librarians are ready for collaborative efforts with faculty in Nigerian higher institutions. However, literature from elsewhere shows that faculty-librarian collaboration in tertiary institutions has focused on

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teaching information literacy (Reed, Kinder, & Cecile, 2007), collection development (Shen, 2012) and attitude of faculty towards collaboration (Yousef, 2010). Generally, the existing literature points to the need for collaboration between academic librarians and faculty for higher productivity in relation to teaching and research, regardless of the inherent challenges involved in actualising this need on a sustainable basis. Consequently, the aim of this study is to examine how librarians can collaborate sustainably with faculty in Nigerian higher institutions. Answers are thus proffered to the following research questions:

1. What area of collaboration with faculty do librarians consider important?
2. What should be the platform for collaboration between librarians and faculty?
3. What special skills do librarians require in order to optimise such collaboration?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested:

1. There is no significant relationship between gender and area of collaboration.
2. There is no significant relationship between age and area of collaboration.
3. There is no significant relationship between work experience and area of collaboration.

Significance of the study

In practice, this study would inform policymakers in relevant institutions on approaches to librarian-faculty collaboration. It will also outline innovative strategies for developing policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels for promoting partnerships between librarians and faculty. Furthermore, the study will provide baseline data for improvement in librarian-faculty collaboration initiatives not just in Nigeria but also in other African countries with similar contextual settings where there is a need to develop such relationships. The study will also specify the requisite skills needed for collaboration. Overall, the study will contribute to bridging the gap between librarians and faculty, by promoting willingness to participate in formal, joint working relationships in order to ensure that both faculty and librarians contribute to the shared vision of the institution.

Literature review

Academic librarians have been found to collaborate with faculty through curriculum planning, information literacy/library instruction and liaison librarian initiative (Abu Bakar, 2009; Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001). The use of liaison librarian initiative in promoting collaboration between the librarians and faculty is well articulated in the literature (Rodwell & Fairbairn, 2008). The literature clearly spells out the roles of liaison librarians to include facilitating training for both faculty and students; developing library instruction programmes; collection development; curriculum development and provision of accreditation reports (Mozyenter, Sanders, & Welch, 2000).

The new frameworks for liaison librarians are the embedded or engaged liaison librarian model and the hybrid model. In the engaged liaison librarian model, the academic librarian seeks to understand how faculty in a particular discipline communicate and share information with a view to enhancing their research productivity (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013). This model allows librarians and faculty to cooperate in course design, thus leading to good delivery and assessment of subject content (West-Pawl, 2012). According to Jaguszewski and Williams (2013), the hybrid model is the dominant trend worldwide, as it allows liaison librarians to work with functional specialists both

within and outside the library. For example, the University of Guelph has embraced the functional specialist innovation. Functional specialists are individuals who have no liaison responsibilities in specific academic departments but serve as “super liaisons” to other librarians and to the entire campus. Functional specialists are proficient in areas such as copyright, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), media production and integration, distributed education or e-learning, data management, emerging technologies, user experience, instructional design, and bioinformatics. No matter the framework adopted in the academe, the aftermath of the liaison librarian initiative is increased communication between faculty and librarians, increased awareness about library resources and services, and a trusted contact person the faculty can easily and freely relate with (Kwadzo, 2014; Thull & Anne Hansen, 2009).

At the University of Manitoba, Ducas and Michaud-Oystryk (2003) examined librarian-faculty interaction. The study found that faculty highly approves a greater level of interaction with librarians in areas such as information services, collection development, information technology, research, and teaching instruction. Similarly, Yousef (2010) identified areas of collaboration between faculty and librarians to include collection development and information literacy. However, he noted that faculty prefers to collaborate with librarians in the area of collection development. Additionally, Bruce (2001) observed that librarian-faculty collaboration could also be achieved through partnership in research, policy development, curriculum design, students' supervision and academic development. However, for such a relationship to thrive well, there must be shared understanding of how the expertise of both parties will enhance students' capacity for learning and research.

Bendriss, Saliba, and Birch (2015) outlined the importance of collaboration between librarians and faculty to include librarians becoming more visible and accessible to faculty and students. Such collaboration also helps to overcome some of the obstacles students encounter in their research engagements, such as inability to use citations correctly as well as inability to effectively review electronic sources and engage more confidently in scholarly writing. Bendriss et al. (2015) argued that librarian-faculty collaboration makes plagiarism less challenging to teach students. From the foregoing, therefore, it can be said that collaboration with faculty provides librarians with the opportunity to demonstrate the value of the library in educational environs.

Recent literature shows that collaboration between librarian and faculty is worthwhile (McNee & Radmer, 2017; Pautz & Gauder, 2017). It is argued that librarian-faculty collaboration results in great improvement in students' information literacy, coursework and engagement in learning, with faculty becoming more conversant with the latest library databases and other information resources. It is maintained that students would realise the usefulness of research guides as well as databases and other information resources, in addition to being able to evaluate the credibility of sources of information and do much more than just ‘googling’. It suffices to note that collaboration between librarians and faculty depicts best practices in information literacy education (Douglas & Rabinowitz, 2016). It is therefore important that librarians collaborate with faculty in order to strengthen students' overall academic success (Massis, 2012).

Henneman, Lee, and Cohen (1995) observed that the relationship between collaborators is usually non-hierarchical. In other words, there is no superior partner in such a relationship, as trust and respect are prerequisites for the success of such relationships (Hudson, Exworthy, & Peckham, 1998). Support for this view also comes from Brasley (2008), who added that shared vision and mutual respect are equally essential for collaboration. Kenedy and Monty (2011) explained that such relationship should be symbiotic in nature. It is therefore important to emphasise that collaboration is different from cooperation, since the latter requires willingness on the part of both parties to create meaningful relationships (Douglas & Rabinowitz, 2016).

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