**PERCEPTION OF LECTURERS ON THE QUALITY OF SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS AND THE CHALLENGES FACING SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

This study focused on perception of lecturers on the quality of scholarly publications and the challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria. Descriptive survey method was adopted for this study. The population of study comprised of the academic staff in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.5 out of 9 faculties in the University of Ibadan (as at August 2012) were selected using Simple random technique. The total population sample was 165 which was 30% of the selected faculties. The findings of the study show that lecturers in the University of Ibadan attested to the quality of scholarly publications in Nigeria. Lack of funds and general incentives to aid scholarly publishing were identified as challenges to scholarly publishing in Nigeria. It is recommended that lecturers should continue to improve on the quality of their research publications. Government and stakeholders should make funds available to scholars for research purposes.

**Keywords:** Scholarly, publishing, Quality, Peer-reviewing, Lecturers, Challenges,

**Introduction**

Scholarly publications are fundamental tools for knowledge development, and the essence is to find solution to human problems (Egwunyenga, 2008). The core of research publications is to proffer solution to problems which have been identified and to form background for further studies which is crucial for university academic staff career advancement. Scholarly publications such as journals, published books and related materials have been considered as the norm for disseminating and validating research output (Ondari-Okemwa2007). Mabawonku (2005) cited by Ocholla (2011) stated that scholarly publishing is a means by which scientific research outputs are publicised but must possess certain features before they can be recommended for scholarship.

 In the academic world, quality of research output is paramount. Quality gives research output prestige (Roux, 2007). Editors and Peer-reviewers are major players in establishing the quality of research works especially research articles. Peer-reviewers are supposed to be experts and have a good knowledge of the subject area of the manuscripts they are reviewing. Peer reviewing has been noted to be an important aspect of scholarly publication which has a history dated back to more than three hundred years of learned enquiry and it represents the traditional instrument of quality control that involves the screening of intellectual output for quality, reliability and credibility (Ocholla2011).

 University academic staffs have been regularly engage in research activities so as to widen their scope of knowledge. Their motivation for engaging in research activities has gone beyond job retention to “research excellence” that is supposed to generate quality papers which
will be used for assessment, promotion and economic gains (Egwunyenga, 2008). The number of papers a lecturer has written and the reputation of the journals in which they

are written determine how the lecturer will be assessed for promotion. To meet up with this mandate, some of them have been observed to engage in some sharp practices which have eroded the quality of research publishing and the purpose for which it was established (Egwunyenga, 2008). Ocholla (2011) observed that some scholars publish their research outputs without allowing it to go through the scrutiny of peer reviewers.

 The challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria are enormous. Lack of funds to assist researchers as publishing in a reputable journal takes a chunk of their income, lack of incentive to motivate them, erratic power supply, non-participation in conferences, to mention a few Olukojo (2002), Ondari-Okemwa (2007) and Egwunyenga (2008). These have resulted to a serious implication on the quality of scholarly output produced by Nigerian lecturers. This study is set to find out the perception of lecturers on the quality of scholarly publications and the challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. Find out lecturers’ perception on the quality of scholarly publications in Nigeria.
2. Assess factors that determine quality of scholarly publications.
3. Find out the challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria.

**Research Question**

1. What is university lecturers’ perception on quality of scholarly publications in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors that determine quality of scholarly publications?
3. What are the challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria?

**Literature Review**

Scholarly publication in institutions of higher learning has been consistently appreciated for its contribution to global economic development and to any nation's gross domestic product (Dhillon, et al. 2015). Scholarly publications are conveyors of scientific research findings and as such they are expected to be factual and original. However Roux (2007) emphasised the importance of quality of scholarly research and he described it as the cornerstone of publishing philosophy and a fundamental importance when assessing a scholarly publisher and his/her work. Ocholla (2011) also observed that one of the main aspirations of researchers is to publish quality papers, especially in credible and prestigious peer-refereed scholarly journals and other publishing houses of good national and international standards. Quality is a concept that makes a scholarly publication prestigious. Mabawonku, 2005 as cited in Ocholla (2011) highlighted some criteria for research quality some of which are originality, readership and audience. International Working Group (2000) cited in Halliday (2001) identified some basic criteria a formal publication should possess to be suitable for professional evaluation which include: publicly available, awareness of relevant community of its existence, long-term access and retrieval, immutable in term of certification, unambiguously identified, bibliographic record (metadata), archiving and long-term preservation. Kling and McKim (1999) in their findings categorised the criteria for assessing the strength of scholarly publishing into three: publicity,
trustworthiness and accessibility. Graf et al., (2007) stated that trustworthiness is the anchor on which academic publishing depends. Editors need to trust peer-reviewers who will vet the manuscript of authors before they are published, authors in turn has to trust editors to select appropriate peer-reviewers and readers have confidence in the publication because they believe it has been peer refereed.

 Editors and peer-reviewers are said to be integral to academic publishing. Graf et al. (2007) described editors as middlemen between authors and peer reviewers. Fischer (2004) cited in Ocholla (2011) referred to them as ‘gatekeepers’ between the author and referees and they are said to access manuscript submitted by author in order to determine its suitability. Hirst, (2012) stated that peer-reviewing is the way editors of academic journals attempt to keep the quality of articles in their publications high, and assure that poor or fallacious research does not get published. Refereeing or peer reviewing is the primary safeguard in scholarly communication which aims to ensure that research findings have been verified by other experts working within the same discipline. Fischer (2004) cited in Ocholla (2011) highlighted certain criteria that could warrant rejection of a manuscript; which include paper not fit for journal’s editorial mission, submission is poorly written, the use of out-dated literature, inadequate level of scholarship and unwieldy writing. Graf et al. (2007) observed that standards and processes used by editor in carrying out their duties should include ensuring that the peer review system is fair with a high standard of objectivity, unbiasness and timeliness.

 Ocholla (2011) observed some weaknesses in peer review process and links most of them to intellectual. Roberts (2004) however established that peer review will

remain a standard that will allow readers to make meaningful distinctions between reputable scholarly work and second-rate material. Solomon (2007) in his view also commended the efforts of peer reviewer in going through the manuscript and sending feedback to editors which has been of great help to authors in improving their manuscripts.

 Scholarly publishing in Nigeria is faced with challenges which have negative effects on the quality of research productivity. One of the major challenges is lack of funds for research publications. Ondari-Okemwa (2007) reported that most of the universities and research institutes in Sub-Saharan Africa are not well funded and the libraries and other research institutes who are major subscribers of scholarly publications are mostly affected. From the findings of Egwunyenga (2008) 94.7% respondents attested to the fact that obsolete libraries, laboratories and workshop facilities are part of the major factors affecting quality of scholarly publishing. Olukojo, (2002) also noted that in the Nigerian university laboratories, locally produced chemicals for research are not available let alone the imported ones. Ondari-Okemwa(2007) discovered that despite library consortium in which libraries come together to subscribe for information materials, they still do not have enough fund to stock the libraries. Lack of incentives has also been identified as one of problems facing scholarly publication, Ondari-Okemwa (2007) reported that in Sub-Saharan Africa, in which Nigeria is a part, scholars are not given incentives that will encourage them to publish. There are no centres to disseminate research output. Birdsall (2004) cited in Egwunyenga (2008) asserted that research findings are expected to be published and disseminated not only for the benefits of
scholars who are in related field with the research but for the benefit of policy makers and every member of the society. Most of the time, research output in Nigeria are not utilized to enhance economic growth. Olukojo (2002), Ondari-Okemwa (2007) and Egwunyenga (2008) agreed that research findings which can be used as solutions to societal problems in most of the Nigerian universities are not being utilised. Research findings are meant to be publicised so that the appropriate sectors of the economy that are in need of the information can make use of them.

 Olukoju (2002) and Ondari-Okemwa (2007) noted that non-participation in scholarly conferences due to economic down turn in most countries in Africa and in Nigeria in particular is a serious impediment to scholarly publishing. Attending conferences is crucial for scholars in institutions of higher learning and other research institutes which helps to them to build capacity and also affords them the opportunity to interact with their colleagues from other parts of the world. In Nigeria scholars do not attend many of these conferences due lack of sponsorship by their institutions. Egwunyenga (2008), Olukojo (2002) and Ondari-Okemwa (2007) also observed a mass migration of scholars to greener pasture outside the country. Olukojo (2002) in particular pointed out the fact that many of the older generation of scholars were preoccupied with other issues such as administration and external politics.

**Methodology**

**Research Design, Population and Sampling**

This study adopted descriptive survey method. The population of study comprised of the academic staff in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. There were 9 faculties in
the University as at August 2012. Simple random technique was used in selecting sample population for this study. Five faculties were picked randomly because of the limited time the research was subjected to; these were: faculties of Agriculture/forestry, Arts, Social-sciences, Technology and Education. 30% of the total number of the selected faculties was used which is 165. The overall sample size was 165 academic staff which constituted 30% of the total population of academic staff members in the university.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection owing to the fact that it has been used severally for similar studies such as(Nicholas et.al. 2005; Salehi, 2007; Moghaddam & Talawar, 2008; Baro & Ebhomeya, 2012) and the extent of reliability can be measured.

 To ensure face validity, the questionnaire was evaluated by two experts in scholarly publication studies and modifications were made based on their assessments. Content validity was established by pre-testing the questionnaire in a pilot study carried out among five academic librarians in the University. Based on the results of the pilot study, questionnaire items were modified to make them measure what they were meant to measure. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using the test-retest method by comparing first time responses with responses after one week and item that does not have up to 75% correlation was omitted from the final questionnaire in order to ensure consistency.

 A total of 165 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to academic staff, and 160 copies were completed and returned, with return rate of 96.97%. The mean age of the respondents was
39.3years, the percentage (87%) of male respondents was higher than female (13%) with the largest proportion of respondents within the age group of 41-50 years which accounted for 53.1% of the total respondents who participated in the study. Respondents who have teaching experience less than or equal to 10 years accounted for 49.4%. Most of the respondents were from Faculty of Education (31.2%).This is based on the fact that the faculties do not have equal number of academic staff and the level of availability and accessibility to the lecturers varied during the field survey, most (96.2%) of the respondents spent at least 10% of their income on research/ scholarly publishing on a monthly basis and (32.5%) of them publish quarterly, and these were mainly senior lecturers.

**Data Analyses**

Responses from the questionnaire were coded and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for the analysis. The analysis carried out on collected data was multi-level. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic data about the respondents and their frequency of scholarly publication.

 Then an understanding of the perception of lecturers on the quality of scholarly publications in Nigeria was established. Next, factors determining quality of scholarly publications, and the challenges of scholarly publications in Nigeria were examined.

**Frequency of Publishing**

In order to assess the frequency of scholarly publication, the respondents were asked to indicate how often they engage in research publishing. It is indicative from Table 1 that all the academic staff reported to have either published quarterly (32.5%), Bi-annually (22.5%) or annually (28.8%), while smaller percentage (16.2%) have published at other times.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic information** | **Options** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Frequency of Publishing | QuarterlyBi-annuallyAnnuallyOthers | 52364626 | 32.522.528.816.2 |
|  |  | **160** | **100** |

*Source:*field survey, September 2012

**Quality of Scholarly Publications in Nigeria**

Table 2provides responses of the respondents pertaining to their perception on the quality of scholarly publications in Nigeria. It is discernible from the information given in the table that a number of varying opinions were given.131 (81.9%) agreed that locally produced scholarly publications usually undergo thorough editorial reviews; the remaining disagreed to this assertion. This implies that many of the academics believed in the editorial processes that locally produced scholarly publications undergo. 99 (61.9%) disagreed that locally produced scholarly publications do not always meet up with the international

standards of scholarly publishing while about 35.6% agreed to the assertion.

 Almost all the academics 123(76.9%) validated the assertion that political and economic factors in Nigeria have negative effects on the production quality of scholarly publications while about (33%) countermand the assertion. The responses on this issue are personal: some believed that because research and publishing of such are attached to being promoted some academics publish their research without necessarily minding the quality, while others did not agree with that.98 (61.3%) academic staff agreed that content and scope of scholarly publications are up to date while 62 (38.8%) disagreed. 138 (86.3%) academic staff agreed that they could subscribe to locally produced scholarly publications.

**Table 2: Perception of Production Quality of Scholarly Publications**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Perception of Quality | Agree | Disagree |
| Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Usually undergo thorough editorial processes. | 131 | 81.9 | 29 | 18.1 |
| Do not always meet up with the international standards of scholarly publishing. | 57 | 35.6 | 99 | 61.9 |
| Are usually well bound and illustrated. | 100 | 62.5 | 58 | 36.3 |
| Political and economic factors have negative effects on its quality | 123 | 76.9 | 35 | 21.9 |
| Lack of grants and other incentives affect the production quality of scholarly publications. | 144 | 90 | 13 | 8.1 |
| ‘Publish or perish’ mandate has a negative effect on the production quality | 93 | 58.1 | 66 | 41.2 |
| Content and scope of locally produced scholarly publications are always up to date. | 98 | 61.3 | 62 | 38.7 |
| I cannot subscribe to locally produced scholarly publications due to their low quality. | 21 | 13.1 | 138 | 86.3 |

**Determinants of quality of scholarly publications**

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents 156(97.5%) agreed that Originality of the publication is one of the criteria that determines the quality of scholarly publication. As many as 149(93.1%) of them admitted Peer-reviewing mechanism as a criterion that determine the quality of

scholarly publications. A lot of respondents agreed that Contents and Scope 148(92.5%), Awareness of relevant community of their existence 134 (83.7%), Bibliographic records 131(81.9%), Paper quality 124(77.5%) are determinants of quality in scholarly publications. However, 71(44.3%), 62(38.7%), 52(32.5) and 37(23.2%) of them disagreed that Prices tagged on publications, Medium/format, Binding and Popularity of authors determines its quality respectively.

**Table 3: Determinants of quality of scholarly publications**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Determinants | Agree | Disagree |
| Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Originality | 156 | 97.5 | 3 | 1.8 |
| Awareness of relevant community of their existence | 134 | 83.7 | 26 | 16.2 |
| Peer-reviewing | 149 | 93.1 | 8 | 5.0 |
| Bibliographic records | 131 | 81.9 | 29 | 18.1 |
| Popularity of authors | 119 | 74.4 | 37 | 23.2 |
| Medium/ format | 97 | 60.7 | 62 | 38.7 |
| Prices tagged on publications | 84 | 52.5 | 71 | 44.3 |
| Contents and scope | 148 | 92.5 | 12 | 7.5 |
| Paper quality | 124 | 77.5 | 36 | 22.5 |
| Binding | 107 | 66.9 | 52 | 32.5 |

**Table 4: Challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Challenges | Agree | Disagree |
| Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Lack of utilization of scholarly publications | 131 | 81.9 | 29 | 18.2 |
| Lack of funds for scholarly publications | 143 | 89.4 | 17 | 10.6 |
| Lack of incentives to encourage scholarly publishers/authors | 146 | 91.3 | 13 | 8.1 |
| Lack of centres for disseminating research outputs | 120 | 75 | 40 | 25 |
| Non-participation in scholarly conferences by researchers | 91 | 56.9 | 68 | 42.1 |
| Brain drain in the academics | 123 | 76.9 | 31 | 19.3 |
| Incompetence on the part of lecturers | 67 | 41.9 | 87 | 54.4 |
| Proliferation of research publications | 91 | 56.9 | 63 | 39.4 |

**Challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria**

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that lack of utilization of scholarly publications is a challenge 131 (81.9%), lack of fund militates against scholarly publishing in Nigeria 143 (89.4%), lack of incentive to encourage scholarship is an impediment to scholarly publishing 146 (91.3%). A good number of the respondents agreed that lack of centres to disseminate research outputs 120 (75%), Non-participation in scholarly conferences by researchers 91 (56.9%), and Brain drain in the academics123 (76.6%) are all challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria. However, as much as87 (54.4%) disagreed that incompetence of lecturers is a challenge to scholarly publishing.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study show that most of the academic staff attested to the assertion that political and economic factors in Nigeria have negative effects on the quality of scholarly publications. This corroborates the study of Olukoju (2002) who pointed out that the economic and political instability has a direct effect on academic research and publishing. Furthermore, as to whether ‘publish and perish’ mandate has a negative effect on the quality of scholarly publications, most of the respondents validated the assertion. This is corroborated by Ewgunyenga (2008) in which he finds 88.5% of his respondents reported that ‘publish or perish’ syndrome has a negative effect on the quality of scholarly publication because it is mostly tied to the promotion of the academic staff. The findings also reveal that locally produced scholarly publications undergo thorough editorial processes; however, this is in contrast to some previous findings (Usang, 2007; Ewgunyenga, 2008). It could be said that lecturers in the University of Ibadan in which the research

was carried out were privileged to have access to facilities like grants and some incentives which enhance research productivity that may not be available to scholars in other universities. This may be one of the reasons why a higher percentage of the academics believed in the quality of locally produced publications, this is buttressed by Akintoye (2008) who observed that University of Ibadan was adequately funded, he points out however, that the accessibility to such incentives has reduced. In the cause of administering the questionnaire, some lecturers, especially professors claimed not to really spend much on research publications because all the resources to do so are made available.

 On the criteria that determine the quality of scholarly publications all the academic validated the criteria outlined but in varying degrees: originality, awareness of relevant community of their existence, peer- reviewing, bibliographic records, popularity of authors, content and scope, paper quality, binding. The result further shows that Medium/format and Prices tagged on publications were the least criteria that determine the quality of scholarly publications. These agree with previous studies (Nema, 2004: Asamoah-Hannah, 2010: Ocholla, 2011).

 The result of the findings of this research shows that the respondents validated almost all the challenges outlined. Lack of utilization of scholarly publications, lack of funds for scholarly publications, lack of incentives to encourage scholarly publications, lack of centres for dissemination, non-participation in scholarly conferences, brain-drain, proliferation of research publications were all in higher percentages. The findings of this study were corroborated by Ewgunyenga (2008), Ondari-Okenwa (2007) and Olukoju (2002).

**Recommendations and Further Studies**

To ensure the quality of scholarly publications and overcome the challenges of scholarly publishing in Nigeria, the below are therefore recommended:

1. Lecturers should continue to improve on the quality of their research publications. This will help to change the notion of the

academics in developed countries about the research output from developing countries like Nigeria.
2. Government and stakeholders should make funds available to scholars for research purpose.
3. Other incentives like scholarships, grants and opportunity to attend conferences both within and outside the country should be provided.

For the purpose of further studies in this area, the researcher suggests a comparative study of lecturers in government universities and that of private universities. Furthermore researchers could examine more than one university as their study population

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