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Factors Affecting Scholarly Research Output in Nigeria: Perception of Academics in South-Western Universities

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Abstract

This study which was carried out in 2009 examined factors affecting scholarly research output in Nigeria with focus on the perception of academics in South-western universities. Two universities were purposively selected from each of federal, state and private universities within the geopolitical zone. A questionnaire was administered to each of 944 respondents selected through stratified random sampling and complemented by in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted among 24 purposively selected academic staff, based on their status and gender. The result showed that there were positive and negative factors that affected research output in the study population. The positive factors that affected research output among respondents included desire for promotion (64.3%), contribution to knowledge (75.6%) and access to local/international research grants (51.7%). Negative factors that dissuaded respondents were fear of rejection of articles for publications (56.7%), lack of funds (72.6%) and unfavourable university policies/guidelines on promotion (53.7%). The study recommended the need for mentoring of young academics, unified university policies on promotion, creation and sustenance of an enabling environment for research and teaching, and funding of research as panacea for improving scholarly research output in Nigeria.

Key words: Research output, academics, South-western universities, Nigeria, university policies

Introduction

With 129 universities, including public and private, aside other non-degree awarding tertiary and research institutions, Nigeria has more universities than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa (NUC, 2013). These universities function as a pivot for academic research in Nigeria. Research is made compulsory for both academics and students either by job description or as a requirement of an academic programme of study. Thus, one of the responsibilities of academic staff is to conduct groundbreaking research that could lead to national growth and development (Imhonopi, 2009; Udoh 2001; Ughegbu 2001). Therefore, out of the three core responsibilities of an average academic which are research, teaching and community service, research is rated highly because research output is not only considered the benchmark for ranking universities internationally and advancing socioeconomic development, but it is also seen as the requirement for promotion among academic staff of universities. Sabo (2005) reiterates this point when he asserted that the main criterion for ranking world-class universities was not so much the volume of teaching, student population, or community services, but research output. Research output has also become the sine qua non for promotion and career advancement of academics. This view has been shared by Omobowale, Sawadogo, Sawadodo/Compaore & Ugbem (2013: 12) when they assert that “publishing is critical to academics as it is a medium through which they are able to disseminate their research findings and contribute to scholarly knowledge and is also a prerequisite for promotion and career advancement”. According to Cetto (1998), one index for measuring research output is the

number and quality of published works by academics in local and international journals, and by the extensive distribution of active serial titles emanating from the universities, which contribute to the generation, dissemination, and application of scientific or management knowledge for development within a country.

However, it has been observed, especially in the 1980s and beyond, that Nigeria has been experiencing a systematic decline in the quality and quantity of research output from its universities (Adesope, Matthews-Njoku & Asiabaka, 2005; Onwubiko, 2004). According to Ogunsola (2004), Nigeria had 24.49% number of international papers published from sub-Saharan African in 1981, but this number fell to 12.6% in 1995. In 2006, Adeyeye (2006) observed that no Nigerian university was listed among the first 6000 universities in the world according to the World Universities' Rating, which was principally based on the number of research output on the web.

Consequently, research output is so important within academia that the popular slogan "publish or perish" holds sway and has become an accepted axiom among academics. An examination of the promotion criteria of most universities, whether federal, state or private owned, shows that there is an emphasis on the number of publications academics have as the basis for their promotion and income considerations as well as for being considered productive or otherwise (Imhonopi, 2009). Therefore, since research output of academics determines their relevance, promotion and future within academia, and is the basis for the international rating of their affiliated universities, this study investigated the factors affecting scholarly research output in Nigeria with focus on the perception of academics in south-western universities.

Brief Literature Review

Research output within academia is a creativity-birthered, problem-solving human activity based on the rigorous application of intellectual resources aimed at investigating a phenomenon or phenomena with the goal to arrive at testable, independent and relevant outcomes useful for academic study, social transformation and/or industrial utility. Okafor (2011) defines it as the quantity of research in terms of publication output and supervision of students that an academic is able to carry out within a defined period. In other words, research output is a quantitative and measurable means by which academics contribute new knowledge to the existing body of knowledge (Yusuf, 2012). For Imhonopi & Urim (2011), research output refers to the problem-solving and intellectual exertions of academics resulting in the volume of production of research publications such as journals, books, chapters in books, monographs/technical reports, conference proceedings, and others.

In his scholarly treatise on the history of research output in Nigerian universities, Yusuf (2012) identified the boom-to-bust eras. He described Nigerian academics during the 1960s to the mid-1980s as having participated in midwifing an era that was called the “research boom” period by their production of volumes of journal and textbook publications to their credit. In that golden era, Nigerian academics were considered research productive. It was during this period that Nigerians became more widely known for their research, the products of which they strived to showcase on the international intellectual scene (Nduka & Falayojo, 1985). The hunger to engage in research was visible in all branches of science and in all fields of human

endeavours - but involved mainly the first generation universities (Olukoju, 2002; Yusuf, 2012). According to Sabo (2005), the quantity and quality of research from tertiary institutions in Nigeria at this period was greeted by the World Bank, the NUC, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and industries that employed graduates, as the best and leading in sub-Saharan Africa. Nduka & Falayojo (1985) reiterated that Nigeria's advancement of knowledge through research then was phenomenal and mainly in the fields of human medicine, agriculture, veterinary science, metallurgy and others. According to Koleoso (1989), there were also technological inventions recorded, notably, the famous mechanised yam pounder (a feat achieved at the Obafemi Awolowo University) and a number of agricultural mechanisation equipment invented at the Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR), Ahmadu Bello University and International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Ibadan.

However, the bust era of research productivity in Nigerian universities is believed to have begun in the late 1980s (Kilonzo & Magak, 2013; Sabo, 2005). As Saint, Harnett & Strassner (2003) observed, Nigeria's total number of scientific publications in 1981 was 1062, but this number dropped to 711 by 1995. In contrast, in the same period (1995), South Africa had 3,413 scientific publications, India had 14,883 publications and Brazil had 5,440 publications. By 1996, the quantity and quality of research had dipped abysmally (Okebukola & Solowu, 2001). In his scholarly work on the state of research output in Nigerian universities, Okebukola (2002a) traced the boom research period to 1962 and 1988 which he said witnessed a steady rise of one to ten in article publications by Nigerians in international journals. He reported that there has been a steady decline from ten to one between 1988 and 2000, a

trend he says has continued till date in the field of science (Okebukola, 2002b). Olukoju (2002) noted that the bust era of research output in Nigeria was typified by the general neglect of tertiary education and the specific marginalisation of courses or subjects which were not considered directly relevant to the nation's quest for technological development. Pointing out the carrot-and-stick treatment given to universities by successive military regimes, most notably the Babangida dictatorship (1985-93), he argued that there was a deliberate recruitment of some of the most articulate scholars and critics into top government positions (as ministers, advisers and ambassadors) while government continued to release a series of repressive policies in dealing with the legitimate demands of academic staff and student unions. He submitted that prolonged and intermittent strikes, violent demonstrations and inevitable closures then became the narrative of tertiary institutions in the country. With poor funding of higher education and the sultry climate of intellectual repression, research output of academics began to dip. Describing the crisis in research output in Nigeria, in a study of the quantity of scientific publications disseminated by eight selected African countries in terms of journals and other academic publications between the period of 2001-2004, Nigeria was ranked fifth (Oyewole, 2009) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Nigeria's performance in scientific publications among selected African countries (2001-2004)

S/N	Country	Total Publication Output
1	South Africa	14,809
2	Egypt	9,895
3	Morocco	3,535
4	Tunisia	2,857
5	Nigeria	2,309
6	Kenya	2,067

7	Ghana	641
8	Senegal	618

Source: Oyewole, 2009.

In a comparative analysis of the research output (local and international publications) of academics within six federal universities in southern Nigeria namely, the University of Benin, the University of Ibadan, the Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nnamdi Azikwe University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the University of Uyo between the period of 1997-2006, Okafor (2011) found out that the highest research output of 12.17 publications per head was recorded at the University of Benin and the lowest of 8.13 at the University of Uyo over the ten-year period. Thus, even the best case scenario of a mean of 12.17 translates to just about 1 publication per academic per year within the surveyed federal universities. Expectedly, the quantity and quality of research output could be much worse in state universities in the country because the institutions are grossly under-funded and poorly supported. Private universities may not be exempted from the challenges that bedevil academic research publishing in Nigeria. Arising from the above analysis, something tends to be wrong with the scholarly research output of academics in Nigerian universities since they have continually reduced in terms of quality and majority have failed to meet international standards giving rise to what Egwunyenga (2008) christened “dystrophies” or crisis in research and academic publications. Notably, the poor situation of Nigerian academics’ research output is not different from what obtains in many African countries as Omobowale *et al.* (2013) and Kilonzo & Magak (2013) admit. In Kenya, for instance, Kilonzo & Magak (2013) argue that up until the 1980s, higher education in Kenya was free with the public purse covering both tuition and living

expenses. According to them, the rationale for free higher education in Kenya was hinged on the need to develop a highly trained manpower that could replace the departing colonial administrators. The education sector, hence, depended on the economic performance of the state. However, problems such as rapid population growth and the IMF-monitored Structural Adjusted Programme led to a reduction in education funding, which forced public universities in Kenya as well as in other African countries to embark on battle for survival. Universities had to become self-sustaining and were given the freedom to decide on the best means of introducing income-generating activities. This lack of funding of public universities also shrank the budget for both the remuneration of academic staff and promotion of scholarly research, forcing academics to adopt self-preservation approaches such as embracing commercial journals whose quality sometimes is suspect but whose availability is a lifesaver for the careers of many of them. In their scholarly work on “Knowledge Production and Domesticating Social Science Textbooks in Nigeria”, Olutayo, Liaidi & Odok (2013) also identified poor funding of universities as the bane of scholarly research output in Nigeria. They argue that due to poor remuneration, academics are unable to publish quality textbooks in furtherance of knowledge production in the country. They also added that of strong significance is the limited time available to lecturers because they are also required to perform other administrative duties outside their academic responsibilities.

Yusuf (2012) contends that the “publish or perish” syndrome within academia could be said to have plunged academics in Nigerian universities into a career-long survival race for promotions and positions within their institutional hierarchies and perhaps beyond. For academics to survive in

such a race, they must obtain desperately needed publications to their credit through research and/or creative development. He therefore asserts that the primary motive of competing in this race is no more than that of career prospects and earning intellectual prestige.

He further noted that funding unquestionably is the most critical factor in university research. He argues that although the National Policy on Science and Technology (NPST) in Nigeria has recommended that 5% of the GNP be set aside for research, Nigeria's federal university system is said to spend only 1.3% of its budget on research. He posits that in federal universities, routine funding from budgetary allocations is channelled through the NUC, which then disburses the funds to the University Boards of Research at the institutional level. However, he observes that research votes from the NUC are not normally disbursed regularly, and when disbursed, are often grossly inadequate to cater for the research needs of the large number of public universities in the country. He opines that this may be related to the Nigerian higher educational system which is adjudged the largest higher education system in Africa. For instance, the current university enrolment of degree students alone is estimated at over 800,000 (Okojie, 2009). Thus, massive increases in enrolment in the universities annually have apparently overwhelmed government's capacity to maintain proportional financial support for research and other services. This has created funding shortfalls. Consequently, despite substantial annual increases in government's recurrent grant to federal universities (see Table 6 above), the system has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality or promote robust research (Saint *et al.*, 2003; Sabo, 2005).

Egwunyenga (2008) also had recognised lack of funds/research grants as a factor inhibiting research output

among academics in Nigerian universities. According to him, paucity of funds and research grants is a problem militating against the research productivity of academics in Nigerian universities. He traced the genesis of this crisis to the mid-1980s, when Nigeria entered a period of economic crises culminating in the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). An immediate consequence of this was the continuous devaluation of the naira from an exchange rate of \$1.00 (U.S.) to ₦1.00 in 1986, to official exchange rate of \$1.00 to over ₦160.00 presently! He believes that this status quo led to the neglect of education generally, and tertiary institutions in particular, to struggle only to pay salaries and wages of staff as a result of the repressive military regimes in place. The situation was further complicated by prolonged and intermittent strikes, violent demonstrations and inevitable closures which became the lot of these institutions. Okebukola (2004) added that the poor funding situation in the country had dried up funds for international conferences and personal researches, while since 1999, there has not been any research grant allocation to any of the federal universities, thus grounding research activities. To protest this obvious neglect of public education in the country, the Academic Staff Union of Universities, the trade union that protects the interests of university lecturers in Nigeria, embarks on industrial strikes regularly to register its disaffection with government authorities just as it did in July 2013 when it went on an indefinite strike to protest government's renege on the agreement reached in 2009 to meet certain mutually agreed objectives by the parties. This leaves the already enervated public university system tottering on the brink of collapse.

This study is an attempt to unravel the perception of academics in south-western universities in Nigeria with regard to factors that affect scholarly research output.

Methodology

This study was conducted in 2009. Data collection was carried out through quantitative and qualitative methods. A questionnaire was administered to each of 944 respondents selected through stratified random sampling and complemented by in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were used to generate qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data from the survey. This was necessary to obtain data from respondents on some aspects of the study which dealt with the attitude, behaviour, individual differences and perceptions on factors that affected their research output. For example, some of the questions that the respondents were asked were these:

- How have you responded to the slogan “publish or perish”?
- Have you ever accessed any local or international grant for the publishing of your scholarly research output?
- What are the major factors responsible for the increase or decrease of your scholarly research output for the past few years?
- How do you fund your scholarly research output?
- How many papers do you have in high-impact journals?

In probing the respondents further, in line with the above interview guide, their responses were quoted verbatim to complement the quantitative generated data for the project.

Population and Sample Size

Six universities in south-western Nigeria were selected made up of two federal universities, two state universities and two private universities with a combined total sample

in south-western Nigeria. Two, they had similar faculties and departments. Lastly, they are funded by private owners. In summary, having obtained the sampling frame, i.e. the list of academic staff from each of the selected faculties and departments, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting from senior and junior academic staff. The required sample size was subsequently drawn from each of the above groups using systematic sampling technique. Furthermore, 24 members of academic staff were purposively selected based on their position and gender for in-depth oral interviews (IDIs). The researchers ensured that the 4 academic staff that were selected from each university were not part of those that earlier participated in the survey. Therefore, two senior academic staff (Senior Lecturer - Professor) and two junior academic staff (Assistant Lecturer – Lecturer 1) were selected for the interview from each of federal, state and private universities.

Method of Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In this sense, simple percentile was adopted in analysing the quantitative data. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analysed through content analysis and, where necessary, important comments from the respondents were quoted verbatim or paraphrased.

Results and Discussion

Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	672	71.2
	Female	272	28.8

Age	20-29	53	5.6
	30-39	414	43.9
	40-49	397	42.1
	50 and above	80	8.4
Marital status	Single	136	14.4
	Married	782	82.8
	Separated	13	1.4
	Divorced	13	1.4
Religion	Christianity	726	76.9
	Islam	187	19.8
	Traditional	28	3.8
	Others	3	0.3
Ethnic Group	Yoruba	667	70.0
	Igbo	160	16.9
	Hausa	39	4.1
	Southern Minorities	70	7.4
	Foreigners	8	0.8
Income per month (N)	50,000 – 90,000	349	37.0
	91,000-150,000	450	47.7
	151,000- and above	145	15.4
Academic rank	Professor	39	4.1
	Associate professor	74	7.8
	Senior lecturer	190	20.1
	Lecturer 1	159	16.8
	Lecturer 2	210	22.2
	Assistant lecturer	272	28.8
Highest qualifications	Ph.D	410	43.4
	M.Sc	444	47.0
	Others	90	9.5
Institutions	UNILAG	186	19.7
	U.I	189	20.0
	LASU	171	18.1
	OOU	184	19.5
	BABCOCK	106	11.3
	COVENANT	108	11.4
Place of residence	Campus	304	32.2
	Off Campus	640	67.8
	Total	944	100

Source: Imhonopi, 2009

Table 3 above describes the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, age, marital status, ethnic group, academic status, highest qualification, and corresponding institutions. The survey revealed that more male lecturers (71.2%) participated in the study than female lecturers, who accounted for only 28.8%. This may be as a result of what Okojie (1998) said that in a patriarchal society like Nigeria, men are breadwinners in most families and therefore are found more in paid employment than females. Regarding the age categories of respondents, more academics were in the 30-39 and 40-49 years age groups than 50 years and above. Precisely, the survey showed that the highest percentage of academics (43.9%) fell into the 30-39 years age group, followed by 40-49 years age group (42.1), while the least were within the age categories of 20-29 years (5.6%) followed by 50 years and above (8.4%). The implication here is that most respondents were young in age. This attests to the growing attraction of many young Nigerian graduates who are now drawn to the university system because of employment opportunities the sector provides, while many older and accomplished academics are retiring or have retired. Data on marital status of respondents revealed that 82.8% were married, while 14.4% were single. This further strengthens the view that with greater employment opportunities within the university system, married academics with responsibilities are lured to pursue a career within academia. With paid employment, more unmarried academics could earn enough to get married. Data on the ethnic origin of the sample showed that respondents from the Yoruba ethnic group (70.0%) dominated the sample. This could be attributed to the fact that the survey was conducted in

south-western Nigeria, predominantly occupied by the Yoruba-speaking ethnic group. However, the presence of other ethnic groups was a strong indication of the cosmopolitan nature of the areas of study. The final category indicated that more academics had Master's degrees (47.0%) than Ph.D. degrees (43.4%). This could explain why many Nigerian academics at the Master's level are more concerned about pursuing their PhD degrees than publishing papers. Additionally, most university promotion policies now make it mandatory for Nigerian academics to complete their PhD degree before they can advance to senior-level academic ranks.

Table 4: Positive Factors Affecting Research Output

POSITIVE FACTORS AFFECTING RESEARCH OUTPUT										
What are those factors that positively affected your research output?	Personal Motivation		Desire for Promotion		Contribution to Knowledge		Access to Local/Int'l Research Grant		All of the Above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Yes	427	45.2	607	64.3	714	75.6	488	51.7	159	16.8
No	517	54.8	337	35.7	230	24.4	456	48.3	785	83.2
TOTAL	944	100	944	100	944	100	944	100	944	100

Source: Imhonopi, 2009

The outcome of the survey as represented in Table 4 considered different responses of academics with reference to positive factors that enhanced their research output. The result revealed that the search for knowledge and the need to extend the frontiers of knowledge (75.6%), which is the principal reason for the existence of universities, motivated respondents to increase their research output. This position was confirmed

by a professor in one of the federal universities who participated in the IDI. According to him:

I don't believe that academics anywhere just publish their research works for promotion sake alone. Although, every academic wants to become a renowned scholar someday in their career, however, any responsible academic knows that, first and foremost, his or her job is to advance the frontiers of knowledge such that the next generation can have the tools, information and knowledge to work with. If renowned scholars before us did not publish what we read to get to where we are today, we would be having numerous challenges by now. So, the onus lies on the present generation to justify their reason of being in academia by also contributing their own quota to the development of the existing body of knowledge for the good of society, the advancement of academic culture and for social transformation (IDI/Male/2008).

Many of the scholars who took part in the interviews also supported the notion that their overriding motive for engaging in research activities was to make their contribution towards knowledge expansion and dissemination in their various fields. This finding appears to support the *raison d'être* for academic scholarship and the founding of universities. Also, the present global society is driven by a knowledge economy that has continued to evolve rapidly over time making knowledge production and reproduction the hallmark of human existence. Essentially, every research effort is likely to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and based on this

body of knowledge policy frameworks could be developed which could result in economic, political, social and cultural advancement of a society. Similarly, scholars' research output culminates in knowledge production which could provide the antidotes for the ills of society, crank out innovations for social (re)construction, preserve the knowledge stock for the future generation and advance theories, concepts, ideas and postulations that help to rarefy the quality of scholarship generally.

In their very recent and fecund contribution on *Knowledge Production and Domesticating Social Science Textbooks in Nigeria*, Olutayo et al. (2013), supported the position that knowledge production and reproduction appear robust within the Nigerian social science community, for instance, because of the sizeable number of seasoned and globally reputed scholars that the community boasts of and their contribution to knowledge. However, they questioned the sources of this knowledge (re)production because of its ties to western orientation and ethos and its disenchantment with local content and contexts.

The desire for promotion (64.3%) was another very important motivator for the engagement in research output by respondents. Many of the interviewees acknowledged that they were also motivated to engage in academic publishing because of the prospect of career advancement that it offers them. They reasoned that by publishing profusely, they could get promoted with the possibility of increasing their earning ability to meet their personal and professional needs. A few others argued that promotion was a source of personal fulfilment and social prestige which made academic publishing a compelling attraction to them.

A junior academic from a private university during the IDI affirmed that promotion and better remuneration was a major driver for his research output. In his words:

I want to become a professor so I can earn better pay to take care of my family and relations. And to do this, I have to publish so that I can be promoted as and when due and be considered productive on the job (IDI/Male/2008).

According to a study on the state of academic publishing of top five countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) with the highest number of journal listings in the African Journal Online (AJOL), findings made supported promotion as one of the main drivers for the research output of academics (Christian, 2008). In answering the question on why academic researchers publish, the study revealed that 72% of the respondents engaged in knowledge production chiefly for the sake of promotion, followed by 53% who published for knowledge dissemination, 52% who published for financial gains and 48% who published for social prestige. Thus, the study argued that promotion within academia has come to be tied to the number of academic publications an academic has. Consequently, the study posited that most academics in developing countries in order to improve their socioeconomic status resort to rigorous academic publishing.

According to Table 4, findings also showed that 51.7% of respondents were interested in increasing their research output because they had access to local and international grants. Some of the respondents, particularly from federal and private universities who participated in the interviews, admitted that they were motivated to publish because they had access to local and international grants. Specifically, a senior female lecturer from one of the federal universities during the IDI agreed that

access to local and international grants was a strong motivator for the increase in journal publications by academics. In her words, she said:

You know the state of Nigeria today. Our take-home pay is meagre and can barely take us home. So, some of us look out for opportunities of getting research grant, which is scarce, to publish our journals. I have been fortunate to have personally benefitted from this (IDI/Female/2008).

Meanwhile, some others remarked that their institutions had a specific amount they had budgeted to assist those who publish their works in what they considered as high-impact journals. However, respondents from state government-owned universities posited that they could not access enough research grants from their various universities because of the poor financial state of most state government-owned and –managed universities. In this line, findings made by Yusuf (2012) and Kakwagh (2013) support the argument that state government-owned universities which are poorly funded compared to their federal counterparts are not able to provide relatively substantial amounts as research grants for academic research in their institutions. However, where international grants are available, it seems that many young academics as attested to by some interviewees do not know how to access these grants.

Table 4 also showed that 45.2% of respondents admitted that personal motivation was the reason for their involvement in research output. This may not be unconnected with the respondents' determination or desire or both to achieve certain personal career objectives which could include attain early

promotion, enhance their earning ability and achieve social prestige on the job.

Lastly, table 4 revealed that 16.8% of the respondents believed that all the factors combined formed the rationale for their research publishing decisions.

Table 5: Negative Factors Affecting Research Output

NEGATIVE FACTORS AFFECTING RESEARCH OUTPUT								
What are those factors that negatively affected your research output?	Fear of rejection of articles for publications		Lack of funds		Unfavourable University policies/guidelines on promotion		All of the above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Yes	535	56.7	685	72.6	507	53.7	65	6.9
No	409	43.3	259	27.4	437	46.3	879	93.2
TOTAL	944	100	944	100	944	100	944	100

Source: Imhonopi, 2009

From Table 5, the factors that had negative effect on respondents' research output were also examined. Respondents noted that lack of funds (72.6%) was the major factor militating against their efforts at increasing their research output. An academic with a state university during the IDI lamented grievously regarding the total underfunding of Nigerian universities which has resulted in low pay and unattractive working conditions for academics. In his words:

The issue is not that Nigerian academics are lazy and do not want to publish journals or write books. But how can you publish on an empty

stomach or when you can barely take care of your family? Take for instance, in my university, we are being owed salaries for months now. And nobody cares how we lecturers are faring. Do you know that as I speak, I have two academic journals that have been accepted in Canada and another one in Europe but I cannot pay the publishing fee being requested. The people have been mounting pressures asking me to pay or jettison the opportunity to have them published in their journals. Now, in this case, what should a hardworking academic who only depends on the income from his job do? This is why some of my colleagues have left the ivory towers to work in the private sector where the pay is far better and regular than what we get in here (IDI/Male/2008).

Many interviewees supported the findings that poor funding was a major albatross of research output among academic researchers in Nigeria. Some argued that robust research efforts could not effectively take place in (i) an environment typified by poor funding of the university system (ii) a state of inadequate and obsolescent infrastructure for teaching and research (iii) a climate of poor and superannuated library facilities which reduce the currency of research results and (iv) a condition of persistent poor remuneration of academic staff which is both demotivating and frustrating as well. Thus, to them, this explains the reason for the exodus of academics to developed climes where they seek to find the Golden Fleece; but even in situations where academics cannot travel abroad, some imigrate to the private or political sector in order to improve their personal economies. These findings support an

stomach or when you can barely take care of your family? Take for instance, in my university, we are being owed salaries for months now. And nobody cares how we lecturers are faring. Do you know that as I speak, I have two academic journals that have been accepted in Canada and another one in Europe but I cannot pay the publishing fee being requested. The people have been mounting pressures asking me to pay or jettison the opportunity to have them published in their journals. Now, in this case, what should a hardworking academic who only depends on the income from his job do? This is why some of my colleagues have left the ivory towers to work in the private sector where the pay is far better and regular than what we get in here (IDI/Male/2008).

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earlier study by Olukoju (2002), where he asserted that academic publishing had declined in Nigeria in terms of output, quality and regularity of publications because of factors such as a general decline in the standards and funding of education, which is a consequence of prolonged military rule characterised by lack of accountability and a thinly veiled culture of obscurantism. He pontificated that these crises have had a direct impact on academic research and publishing and resulted in many outstanding scholars simply fleeing the country's tottering ivory towers for more stable climes, and many being distracted into pursuits aimed at ensuring their greater financial remuneration and material comfort. He mainly located these crises as a product of military hegemony of the Nigerian state. While the authors of this article admit that under the long spell of a kaleidoscope of military dictatorships in Nigeria, the university system suffered a bout of backflips and somersaults which throttled research output of academics, it seems that with a return to democratic or civilian dispensation, the university system in the country is yet to experience the anticipated zephyr for robust research publishing.

Concerning publishing in pricey international journals as a getaway for many academics in Nigeria as attested to by some of the interviewees, this orientation tends to sustain the globalised world dominated by Western scholarly hegemony (Omobowale et al, 2013; Olutayo, et al, 2013; Oyinlola, 2013). Particularly, as Omobowale et al. (2013) contended, universities in Africa, including Nigeria, through their regulatory policies favour publication in journals based in Western countries over that in domestic journals, irrespective of the former's quality. According to them, the assumption is simply that "once a journal is located in Europe, the United States or Canada, it must be a standard journal" (2013: 5). This may have resulted in

the frustration faced by some academics who insist on publishing in the so-called international journals to meet up with the exorbitant fees required by them. However, academics who prefer these fee-charging journals may not be blamed because the so-called high-impact journals that do not charge fees and most of which are located in the Global North have developed certain benchmarks which are difficult, if not impossible, to reach. Some of them, as some interviewees noted, seem to show bias against research works from Global South however good the paper may be. This thus throws up the need to review the predilection for international publishing as a basis for career advancement in many African universities and the need for the African intelligentsia to evolve its own unique publishing standards clear to African scholars.

Apart from lack of funding, another factor admitted to by respondents in Table 5 as being a drag on their research output, includes fear of rejection of articles for publication (56.7%). In this regard, a junior lecturer from a private university who participated in the IDI said:

I have not been able to publish most of my articles because before any of such articles could be accepted, one would be asked to pay a certain amount of money and if you don't have that money at the time, it means your article would be rejected even though it is a good one. Another reason is that I am a bit discouraged because my papers were constantly being rejected in the places I sent them to. Well, I will not give up. I will continue to do my best (IDI/Female/2008).

The view expressed by the interviewee above suggests that some academics, especially junior-ranked academic staff, are dissuaded from engaging in robust research output for the fear

of rejection of their research works. However, this rejection issue may not have been unconnected with the quality of such articles. But some interviewees pointed out cases where they were discriminated against or that politics was involved in the selection of papers for a journal publication. This may have informed the opinion held by Olukoju (2002; 6) that one of the getaways for some academics not willing to perish in the "academic jungle" was for them to band together and form journals within their departments and faculties where access is only for friends and associates. The issue of money as a basis for accepting an article is also a growing but worrisome dimension to academic publishing as shown by not only some international journals but also some local journals in Nigeria where the editors and managers of such journals see scholarship as merely a money-spinning enterprise for the highest bidder.

In the same Table 5, about 53.7% of respondents also identified unfavourable university policies and guidelines on promotion as a demotivation in their quest to engage in robust research. This was amplified by a senior female lecturer from a state university in the study area during the IDI. According to her:

Some universities emphasise so much on publishing in some specific international journals whose demands are tall to meet and their publishing fee is high. For a young scholar with limited funds, how does the individual survive? In some instances, some of the journals approved by some departments cannot be easily accessed. All these things discourage young academics especially. Do you know that in my university, it is claimed in some quarters that until you have a PhD or are a professor you cannot write a book.

Some university policies even ban their lecturers from writing and selling books to students. The question again is, if lecturers don't write books, what else should they write? So you see, the differing university policies which approve one thing in one place and disapprove the same thing in another place sometimes make it difficult and dampen the morale of academics to publish more books, monographs and others.

As admitted by the interviewee above, the criteria for promotion and academic publishing differ from one university to another. Some interviewees confirmed this position. Further probing of interviewees revealed the existence of deep dichotomy in the criteria for promotion and publications within federal, state and private universities. For instance, some interviewees mentioned that their institutions made specific demands for publishing in certain high-impact journals without which promotion and career advancement could be stalled whereas this was not the case with some institutions where all they wanted was publications in any quality journals. Also, the views of interviewees showed that university policies differed with regard to the number of publications an academic is required to have in order to move from one level to a higher level. Even in some private universities, as some of the respondents noted, the rating of books and journals is the same whereas in most federal and state universities, the rating is quite different, mostly in favour of journals.

In line with the above findings, Olutayo et al. (2013), have identified some reasons for the limited knowledge production in the area of books, particularly in the social sciences. They pointed to the adversarial or dichotomous university policies in Nigeria which seem to agree on the need

for scholars to publish in international journals while rating book publishing very low because they consider textbooks to be “a mere compilation of what is known, written downward to the understanding and level of the general audience or students, (and) giving these books a character of ‘inferior’ and ‘second-hand’ scholarship” (2013: 59). Thus, they admit that ratings between journal publications and published books vary widely as more academics who seek promotion prefer to write for journals because they are rated higher than books in their institutions. In their words:

People know that promotion is facilitated more by journal publications than written textbooks. It is not as if people apply more seriousness and scholarship to one or the other, but in assessing individual scholarship, administrators give higher preference and rating to journals (Olutayo, *et al.*, 2013; 64).

Thus, knowledge production with regard to textbook publishing is limited and disadvantaged while knowledge production with regard to journal publications appears to be on the climb in many universities in Nigeria because extant university policies are favourable towards journals and rate them higher than textbooks for promotion and career advancement purposes. For a robust and exhaustive scholarly treatment of this subject see Olutayo, *et al.* (2013).

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined factors affecting scholarly research output in Nigeria with focus on the perception of academics in six selected south-western universities. The result showed that there were positive and negative factors that affected research output in the study population.

Most respondents admitted that contribution to knowledge expansion was the basis for their research output. This finding justifies the *raison d'être* for the establishment of the university as an epistemic entity within the society. It also shows that the premier responsibility of scholars as purveyors of knowledge production, reproduction and expansion is not lost on the surveyed academics. Such knowledge production provides numerous advantages for social (re)construction, development and advancement. However, as some scholars have identified, the sources of this knowledge are pro-West without recourse to local content and contexts. Respondents also mentioned that the desire for promotion with its concomitant prospects of increase in earning ability, a source of personal fulfilment and social prestige guided their research publishing efforts. Existing literature supports the notion that promotion within academia has come to be tied to the number of academic publications an academic can produce and that academics in developing countries now strive to publish rigorously in order to get promoted and to improve their socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, it appears that this situation has forced many academics to patronise predatory, substandard and pricey so-disant international journals who cash in on this opportunity to make a fortune for themselves at the expense of scholarship in its hallowed, preeminent and pristine state.

Again, findings showed that respondents were engaged in research output because they could access local and international grants. But this throws a challenge to academics working in state universities, for instance, whose institutions are burdened with recurrent expenditures and do not have any reasonable budget to assist academic staff in the pursuit of their research endeavours. Also, some academics, especially the

junior-ranked, may not even know if these grants exist and if even when they do, they seem not to know how to access them. This was confirmed by some interviewees in the study. Findings also showed that some respondents claimed they were motivated to publish because of personal motivation. This implies that in spite of resource inadequacy, infrastructure deficits and lack of grants, among other conundrums, some academics still go ahead to publish. Meanwhile, a few of the respondents mentioned that they were inspired by all the factors such as contribution to knowledge, desire for promotion, access to grants and personal motivation in their publishing pursuits.

Concerning the negative factors that dissuaded respondents from engaging in robust research publishing, findings revealed that lack of funds was the chief culprit. This was confirmed by many interviewees who bemoaned the poor state of funding of public universities in Nigeria. This status quo could have resulted in the alarming brain drain syndrome experienced within many universities as many Nigerian scholars leave the shores of the country to work in advanced societies where the socioeconomic *mise en scene* looks more favourable. Even with the return of democracy in the country, better days for the university system seem to be lingering. Findings also showed that many respondents did not participate in research publishing because of the fear that their journal articles for publication could be rejected. However, this situation could be a result of the poor quality of work that mostly young academics chunk out or it could be related to a concatenation of politicking and other subjective factors beyond the control of these young researchers. Thus, young scholars are lured to send their publications to substandard, lowly-rated and predatory journal publishers whose business includes everything but publishing scholarly journals. Additionally, findings revealed that many

respondents were dissuaded from engaging in robust knowledge production and dissemination because of university policies and guidelines which were both adversarial as well as dichotomous. For instance, as admitted by some interviewees, the criteria for promotion in federal, state and private universities differ almost on an institutional basis. In this case, while some institutions placed high premium on high-impact journals, many of which are foreign-based in nature and location, some other institutions just request for publications in any quality journals also based abroad. Similarly, while some universities rate journals more than textbooks, some others rate them as being equal. This divisive dichotomy has been eloquently critiqued by some scholars who see such a tradition as not helping African scholarship, knowledge production and the autonomy of its intelligentsia.

Following the above findings, it seems patent that there is need to encourage academics in Nigeria to continue to commit themselves to knowledge (re)production and dissemination because of the numerous advantages this presages. Since global university rating, social advancement and the promotion, preservation and independence of indigenous scholarship are dependent on the quality and quantity of research publishing embarked on by academics, everything should be done to encourage it. To this end, workshops and seminars need to be organised to teach fledgling academics on how to write quality papers and to access grants for publishing their research works. African scholarship should be encouraged to define its own criteria for research output which should become the guideposts for knowledge production and publishing and should be subscribed to by African scholars. Government should also seek ingenious ways to free resources in order to improve its funding of higher education in general

and the universities in particular. Lastly, university administrators must seek ways to harmonise university policies on promotion criteria and on research publishing sources. This process can be mediated by the National Universities Commission.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to the selected federal, state and private universities in South-western Nigeria. Involving more universities within or outside the region could alter the research outcomes.

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