ACADEMIC COLLABORATION FOR EFFECTIVE CAREER PROGRESSION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATORS IN UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL, NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract
This paper examined issues and challenges surrounding the academic collaborative activities among LIS educators for effective career progression in universities in North-central, Nigeria. Collaborative learning activities has become an important tool for intellectual and professional development for all professions including LIS profession. Adopting different forms of academic collaborative activities especially in universities has become a key solution to solving complex and critical problems surrounding career progression. This paper therefore, examined glaring issues and challenges surrounding the career progression of LIS educators in universities in North-central, Nigeria. The paper further discussed activities involved in career progression; concept of academic collaboration; types of academic collaboration for effective career progression; advantages of academic collaboration; issues and challenges of academic collaboration, strategies for effective academic collaboration. The study concluded that when collaboration is being practised appropriately, it is likely to invigorate the faculty members in the pursuit of their career to a successful end because collaboration is a tool that can either make or mar the success of career progression among LIS educators if not adequately managed. The study, therefore, recommended among others that faculty members especially the newly employed staff should be mentored on the need for collaborative activities for effective career progression

Keywords: Academic Collaboration; Career Progression, Library Information Science Educators, Issues and Challenges, Universities In North-Central, Nigeria.

Introduction

The importance of career progression in a university system cannot be overemphasised because generally, employees in every institution particularly institutions of higher learning are expected to be productive and one of the physical indicators of this is seen in the career progression of faculty members including Library and Information Science (LIS) educators in universities in Nigeria. This simply means that every academic staff in a university be it either federal or state university is expected to be engaged in a progressive career activities. Career progression in a university system is simply the process of moving or elevating in the right direction from one position or rank to another during the working life of an employee.

Career progression is seen as a life time process in an academic setting. According to Omekwu (2021) career progression is synonymous to career development, career advancement, career movement, career upliftment or career mobility, therefore can be used interchangeably. According to Half (2021), career progression or development does not happen overnight rather it is a continuous process that an individual works on during his professional life, this means that any of the conventional signs of achievement, such as getting a promotion, earning a pay raise, or excelling at performance appraisal time, are all part of developing individuals' career.

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According to Saka (2019) LIS educators are trained LIS professionals that are employed to teach LIS courses and supervise LIS researches in library schools whether at polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education and or universities In order for LIS educators to effectively achieve career development, collaboration should be put in place.

Activities involved in Career Progression

The importance of activities involved in career progression cannot be over emphasised. According to Abga and Bello (2023) career progression being an effective way to successfully grow and develop workers' professional life. It consists of the goals one intends to achieve, the position a person wishes to attain in his career life, the remunerations and emolument packages. For this reason, there are certain activities that come along with the journey of career progression as an employee moves from the rank of Graduate Assistant to the rank of a Professor. These activities can be achieved through collaborative efforts depending on the types of activity. These are:

1. **Professional Certification:** as part of the career progression, it is expected that lecturers particularly LIS educators are engaged in other professional certifications as this portrays an individual's expertise, skill, and most importantly knowledge in a specific area of study. This helps an individual's credibility and reputation.

2. **Leadership/Administrative Roles:** LIS educators are also expected to take up responsibilities that involve guiding, directing and managing activities to specifically achieve a goal. An individual can be mentored in terms of leadership and administrative roles as they move through the ladder of career progression.

3. **Publications:** these are intellectual printed works of people mostly in books, magazines, journals, conference papers, theses and dissertations, reports among others. This has become the most important part of promotion criteria which may either make or mar an individual's career progression. As contained in the promotion guidelines, a specific minimum number of publication is required depending on the rank an employee may be applying for.

4. **Awards/Recognition:** these are activities of career progression involving an individual's acknowledgement of his positive contributions to a particular field, profession, institutions, programme or even a society. This also can boost an individual's reputation an credibility

5. **Academic Qualifications:** As LIS educators continue to move in the right direction, they are expected to earn degrees or certificates before attaining certain ranks. For example, an employee may be required to possess a PhD in LIS before attaining the rank of a senior Lecturer in a University.

6. **Community Services (within and outside the university):** This is simply a voluntary service or work offered just to benefit a community or its members. This is considered as part of activities counted for promotion in the career progression journey.
7. **Students Supervision:** this involves coaching or supervision of both undergraduate and postgraduate students as the case may be.

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8. **Promotions:** this usually is considered the most important part of the career progression processes as it brings together all other activities for one to be able to achieve his goal.

Concept of Academic Collaboration

Collaboration is a key term that has been emphasised in the literature of research and information science. Collaboration happens when a group of individuals join forces to share their knowledge and experiences in order to achieve a single goal, project, or objective. Academic collaboration could influence career progression because it is an academic relationship that involves a partnership between two or more individuals academically working together to purposely achieve a common goal. With regards to this study, it involves two or more LIS educators coming together to collaborate in terms of research, teaching, supervision, community services among other academic activities for the purpose of career advancement or progression.

Saka and Ibrahim (2023) stated that professional collaboration among academic staff especially at university level would help fulfil the objectives of establishing university and leading to effective, teaching, research and community service and consequently lead to National development. The authors therefore concluded that the spirit of collaboration among academics staff whether high or low would have a corresponding effect on national development. In a similar vein, Sprunger (2017) indicated that when experts in diverse fields collaborate especially through researches or any other academic activities, the intersection of divergent fields leads to innovative and original ideas, products, technologies and knowledge. Saka (2019) described collaboration in academics as a type of mentoring whereby two or more LIS educators particularly professor(mentor) and graduate assistant (mentee) coming together to make intellectual contributions in the form of teaching, research, publication, community service and staff exchange programmes with the library and information science schools.

Gurat and Sagun (2018) opined that collaborative learning technique improves the learners' problem-solving skills. This means that when individuals particularly the LIS educators are engaged in collaborative learning activities such as research or article writing, students' supervision, patent/creative work among other activities, they will become more productive as different ideas and knowledge are brought together to solve a specific problem for positive improvement. Collaborating academically with colleagues in terms of teaching, publications, researches, students' supervisions and other administrative activities is crucial to the overall success of career progression of LIS educators.

Types of Academic Collaboration

Various types of academic collaboration exist in a university. Saka *et al.* (2014) stated that as academic staff, they are expected to conduct research, teach, supervise students on SIWES and research projects, and embark on community services either individually or through collaboration, For instance:

2. **Collaboration in teaching within/outside the institution**: the importance of collaborative teaching cannot be over emphasised as it enhances the quality of what students are taught in class. This type of collaboration can takes place within and even outside the university to support teaching and learning activities. Saka and Ibrahim (2023) stated that collaborative teaching has to do with curriculum design, planning, implementation and evaluation.

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3. **Collaboration in community services within/outside the institution:** faculty members particularly LIS educators can collaborate in terms of providing the immediate community with some of their pressing issues. Librarians and faculty members in the same university or from other universities can collaborate in community development by way of building blocks of classroom and libraries, donation of library materials and books to host community, primary schools as well as professional development (Saka, 2019).

4. **Collaboration in research within/outside the institution:** this type of collaboration involves two or more LIS educators having the same or related area of specialisation can come together to carry out a study to foster their level of career progresiion. Durante (2022) further mentioned that it is only when people come together with their best ideas, harness skills, talent and direct these towards a completion of a task, a project or overcoming a problem that has plagued institutions or societies at large, only then the best outcomes and products are produced. Furthermore, Durante (2022) stated that doing research or work independently is a demonstration of intellectual grit. However, participating in collaborative activity involves more intellectual virtues including curiosity, intellectual humility, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, and open-mindedness which are characteristics necessary to advance in the 21st century research.

5. **Collaboration in publications within/outside the institution:** LIS educators can engage in collaborative publications to ensure progressive career activities. Aiyebelehin (2022) noted that most academics' research behaviour have been driven by the need to achieve the publishing standards imposed by various institutional authorities. This is because the degree of collaboration especially in publications are increasingly being used as a criterion for promotions in academic institutions, as due to this, researchers are now collaborating. Saka and Ibrahim (2023) supported this by stating that collaborative publication is a situation whereby academic librarians jointly publish an article with faculty members be it an LIS educators or faculty member or both. This could also bring about progressive career activities.

6. **Collaboration in students' supervision within the institution:** collaboration in supervision of students is of paramount importance, this could be in Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) training, thesis and or undergraduate project supervision. According to Saka and Ibrahim (2023). It is a common practice whereby academic staff within a faculty/school jointly supervise students on either SIWES training and in students' projects

7. **Collaboration in administrative responsibilities:** universities cannot survive without administrative activities including departments. LIS educators can jointly collaborate in various administrative responsibilities assigned to them for the overall development of the department. For example during departmental accreditations, committees can be set up to jointly carry out activities for effective and smooth accreditation exercise.

Advantages of Academic Collaboration

Man is a social being and it is the interaction between members of a group that motivates them to effectively work together. There are numerous advantages of collaborating academically. According to Ekpoh and Edet (2017) certain reasons why people collaborate are as follows:

1. it enables access to skills and expertise
2. it enables access to equipment, resources or "stuff" that one does not have
3. it improves access to funds

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4. it enables one to gain respect, admiration and recognition for professional advancement and efficiency (that is more hands and minds make it easier to learn the tacit of knowledge that goes with the techniques among others.

A single research perspective would not be able to stimulate innovation and knowledge advancement, but sharing perspectives and ideas may allow LIS educators to benefit from collaborative partnerships by having rare opportunities to work with colleagues they may not otherwise meet, boosting the likelihood of collaborative publications, research, supervisions among others which are very significant and advantageous to researchers' careers.

General Issues and Challenges of Academic Collaboration

With every advantages, there must be disadvantages or challenges affecting whatever situation. There are numerous challenges of collaborating with individuals generally be it academic or otherwise. According to Sachannand (2012) challenges faced by collaborators are: lack of fund, infrastructural limitations in ICT, issues in politics and culture, time consideration and inadequate collaborative climate. Part of the issues that may be surrounding collaboration is individuals' having issues with some of their personal qualities such as:

6. **Lack of self-confidence**: part of the issues surrounding collaboration among individuals is lacking the self-confidence to present oneself as approachable to colleages. To support this Kwibisa1 and Majzoub (2018) stated that common issues in collaborative activities include: lack of clear objectives and goals, lack of drive among collaborators, unclear division of responsibilities, lack of transparency, unclear shared benefit, absence of collective identity and conflict of interest.

7. **Not open minded:** when individuals are not open minded especially among collaborators, the relationship is bound to be affected as most individuals would love to keep matters to themselves.

8. **Unwillingness to freely share knowledge and skills:** The issue of not being open minded can bring about the employees unwillingness to share relevant knowledge and skills with others.

9. **Lack of commitment**. Lack of commitment especially when responsibilities are shared among collaborators can destroy the relationship among them. Successful collaboration team must have individuals who are dedicated, committed and are ready to do work for the purpose of career development.

10. **Funding:** one of the major issues in collaborative activities is who to fund the project at hand. When financial responsibility statements are spelt out clearly, it saves a lot of energy, time and of course money among collaborators.

These are some glaring issues surrounding effective collaboration thereby affecting career activities of faculty members including library and information science educators. In essence, collaborative activities in the academic environment bring together more academics particularly professors, other lecturers and students, into an active research writing, teaching, supervision, community service among other activities. It further allows a more experienced researcher to mentor and assist a less experienced one or an even more confident researcher to encourage and include a less confident one. Therefore, library and information science

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education will receive a boost if collaborative activities among LIS educators is being practised and encouraged.

Strategies for effective Academic Collaboration

Despite all issues stated earlier, LIS educators can develop strategies in order to achieve a successful, peaceful and effective academic collaboration among colleagues for career progression through:

x. **Mentorship:** collaboration can be encouraged through formulation of mentor and mentee relationship especially within the department. In doing this, faculty members especially the newly employed staff should be mentored on the need for collaborative activities for effective career journey. This will foster cordial relationship among colleagues including senior colleagues.

xi. **Setting up a Committee:** when collaboration is effectively established through mentorship, the department can set of up committee(s) to oversee the affairs of collaborative activities among employees. Department of LIS can set up a committee on how to delegate and continuously monitor collaborative activities among employees. This will foster unity and understanding among colleagues within the same departments. This committee will nominate individuals to develop a research topics to individually accommodate other colleagues in their paper atleast once or twice in a year.

xii. **In house training/workshop on collaborative learning activities:** The department through a committee can organise regular training within the department on the need for a collaborative activity for the overall development of the department and university at large. Regular in house training/workshop can be organised by departments on the need for LIS educators to be engaged in collaborative learning activities within or outside the university.

Conclusion

The indispensability of collaboration cannot be over emphasised as it is an important tool for progressive career activities. When collaboration is being practised appropriately, it is likely to invigorate the faculty members in the pursuit of their career to a successful end because collaboration is a tool that can either make or mar the success of career progression among LIS educators if not adequately practised. Therefore, collaboration can have a positive impact on the career progression of LIS educators as it will help them develop skills and refine such skills to be successful in their career. Collaboration among individuals especially LIS educators is, therefore, crucial to the success and development of Library and Information Science Education in universities in North-central, and Nigeria at large.

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