Full Length Research

Mentoring, Collaborative Scholarly Research and Publishing: Prescription for Enhanced Career Progression among Librarians at the University of Ghana

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The study surveyed the attitudes and perceptions of practicing librarians at the University of Ghana towards mentoring particularly in the area of scholarly research and publishing. A census approach was used to survey all the 22 practicing librarians. The study revealed that librarians at the University of Ghana have not been very productive as scholarly authors through collaborative research. The University of Ghana Library System (UGLS) does not have any formalized and dedicated mentoring programme with regard to career development and progression of its professional staff. Reasons for absence of mentoring culture in the library includes: uncertainty about mentoring benefits; failure to recognize one's mentoring expertise; reluctance to put one's expertise and acknowledge out there; and lack of confidence in mentoring.

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INTRODUCTION

Librarians at the University of Ghana (UG) have been accorded academic status similar to those in the faculty. Consequently their reputation and career progression and promotion are largely determined by their research publication in peer-reviewed journals.

The new role of publishing and professional presentations at conferences has been stressful and challenging to most librarians at the University of Ghana. The use of research productivity through publication in peer-reviewed journals as a major factor in evaluating and promoting these librarians have made it imperative for the librarians to pursue research along with performing their traditional job duties and professional service.

Traditionally, research and publishing had not been a culture of practicing librarians at U G. Previously, practicing librarians got promoted 'easily' based on years of service and performance on the job, supported in a few cases with evidence of written technical reports and memos. In spite of formal expectations for research and publication by librarians at UG, there have been little or no initiatives to support librarians in meeting their research and publication needs.

For three consecutive times, the University Librarian

has been appointed from the faculty – the Department of Information Studies. This trend has been explained in part by the fact that practicing librarians from within the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS) have not been adequately mentored both in terms of scholarly publishing and managerial acumen to take up the mantle whenever the position of a University Librarian became vacant.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the University of Ghana where academic librarians can only achieve tenure and promotion through scholarly publication, the importance of mentoring cannot be over emphasized. Given the increasing pressure for these librarians with academic status to publish calls for the need to have an effective mentoring programme, formal or otherwise that would facilitate scholarly publishing for librarians at the University of Ghana.

Though collaborative research through mentoring has been advocated as a cost-effective means by which librarians at the University of Ghana can overcome their individual inadequacies in research activity, what exists at the University of Ghana currently for newly hired and young librarians could be described as orientation/induction where the new hires do spend time with a sectional head to get acquainted with the position.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the paper is to examine the current situation at the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS) with regards to mentoring practices and professional development opportunities and the extent to which these librarians are engaging in collaborative research and scholarship. Attitudes towards mentoring from the perspective of the senior and experienced professional librarians and that of the newly hired professional librarians are also explored.

METHODOLOGY

Various methods of data collection were used, including the use of questionnaires and personal interview. A census approach was used to survey all the 22 practicing librarians within the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS). Copies of questionnaires were administered to all the librarians. A two page 15- point questionnaire was developed after a review of mentoring and professional development literature by the author. Respondents readily provided relevant information on their perception and opinion about mentoring in academic library. Eighteen (18) completed questionnaires were returned

thus giving a high response rate of 81.8%.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature is to pull together selected research reports that examine how some organizations, including academic libraries approach mentoring and how they perceive the role and function of mentoring programmes that support scholarly writing and publishing.

According to Darwin (2000) mentoring is first encountered during the establishment stage, usually when young people first enter an organization and are in most need of guidance and support. Mentors in their mid-to-late 40s, at the maintenance stage of their career, pass on their acquired knowledge to young people who have just started, enabling them to build a sense of identity and purpose.

According to Hass and White (1997), mentoring aids individuals entering a new occupation or movement into a different aspect of the same occupation- for example, a technical service librarian moving into reference service. It provides the mentee with guidance and support, new knowledge and abilities, increases self- confidence and enhanced employability. Mentoring relationships allow individuals to pass on knowledge gained from work experience that cannot be taught strictly through an academic programme (Hass and White, 1197).

In the view of Lee (2009) library school provides a foundation but on-the-job experience partnered with good mentoring will benefit new librarians. She further maintains that mentoring co-workers is always a benefit to the institution. It is important for new workers because it helps in learning the position quicker. Guidance from the mentor can alleviate stress that the worker might be feeling. In addition, the mentee can feel like the institution does care whether they succeed or fail in the position (Lee, 2009).

This is further supported by Sevetson (2007) who asserts that library schools do not teach anything individuals need to know to be good librarians; this knowledge often comes from on-the-job experience. Mentoring newly graduated librarians in the workplace is a way to enable individuals to gain valuable knowledge and to become better librarian.

Baltin (1997) on her part maintains that mentoring represents an individual's commitment to seeking out, identifying, and developing in a variety of ways the leaders of the future. Part of the commitment is to urge others to fully develop their potential (Baltin, 1997)

Munde (2000) observes that mentors often find renewal of professional purpose, a sense of satisfaction that one has helped to influence the future of the profession and the ability to identify and advise future professionals. According to Kuyper-Rushing (2001), establishing

mentoring relationships provides guidance for the academic librarian seeking promotion, tenure status, or reappointment. It enables the new librarian to observe departmental activities, the goal, and procedures of the library.

Neyer and Yelinek (2011) note that good interpersonal skills and solid professional skills are equally important and suggest encouraging more experienced librarians to mentor by providing continuing education in mentoring. Goldman (2011) also suggests mentors and mentees having reasonable time commitment expectations, mutual respect, and willingness to listen and learn from each other.

That, organizations all over the world including academic libraries are adopting mentoring as an effective way of developing staff in the "real world" cannot be overemphasized. Britnor (2001) asserts that though training has its place in the acquisition of new skills, it is less suited to fine tuning skills and to exploring specific individual situations or behavior's in anything close to "real time". Mentoring therefore provides library professionals guidance as they start their careers and assistance during times of transitions with support to overcome professional challenges (Bosch et al., 2010)

According to Stephens (2011), support can be achieved through informal mentoring but this shfts responsibility to initiate and organize the mentoring process to the mentee. This, in Stephens' view is problematic, because a new librarian may not have the network or knowledge to find a mentor. Mentoring programmes can cushion and guide the process, especially for introverted individuals. Such formal mentoring programmes benefit library organisations as a means for recruitment and retention of the library workforce, while benefiting the employee by engaging them in ongoing learning and professional development (Freedman, 2009).

A number of authors have supported the need for librarians to conduct research. According to Livonen et al. (2012) the success and strength of university libraries is due to knowledgeable, skillful and motivated workforce, while unskillful, passive and alienated staff members often use a victim approach to complain all day about weakness of the organization without bringing forward any solution.In the view of Troll (2013) academic librarians cannot effectively prepare for the future or position themselves on campus until they understand their changing roles in the current learning and research environment, which is radically different from the environment a decade ago.

In an article titled "supporting a culture of scholarship for academic librarians" Sapon-White et al. (2004) assert that the challenge for academic librarians is not only to support their faculty by developing and evaluating new services and applying their knowledge of library services to new situations. They are also expected to

communicate to their professional peers what they have learned so that their research can be added to the corpus of library science knowledge (Sapon-White et al. 2014)

As early as 1972, the "Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians" emphasized librarian's research roles in both professional interests and work responsibilities (Association of College and Research Libraries, 1972). Other studies have supported this assertion. For instance, Powel et al (2002) observe that conducting research can contribute to career advancement for librarians, especially academic librarians on tenure track. Hernon and Schwartz (1993) also maintain that research is not an activity that occurs at the fringes of the field. Rather, it is central to the continued development of library and information science as a profession or discipline represented by graduate programmes within academia. Such a profession or discipline matures and gains stature through its theory and research, as well as through those who advance its theory and research (Hernon and Schwartz, 1993)

In 2005, "A Guide for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians" confirmed the importance of inquiry and research activities such as scholarly publication, presentation of papers, and reviews of books (Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 2005)More recently, the 2007 "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians" set the line for determining research quality of academic librarians so that their world could be more easily translatable to the academic community as a whole (ACRL, 2007)

In the view of Kennedy and Brancolini (2012) it is becoming more important for librarians to study their own operations in a systematic and reliable manner. All academic librarians should therefore possess the knowledge and skills to conduct operations research.

Rentfrow (2008) asserts that if librarians are to convince faculty that they are their intellectual equal, then the degree cannot be simply a vocational one. What is needed for the research library of the future are librarian-scholars prepared and trained by degree programme that requires rigorous scholarship, publication, and teaching as part of the training.

Swisher (1986) on his part, believes that librarians can make better decisions about how to achieve library effectiveness if they have a knowledge of the research process and as individuals, they can more effectively consume the professional research literature. He concludes that the responsibility of practical research is probably the most important role a librarian can accept.

Publishing in blind peer reviewed journal articles tend to be viewed as most desirable for those judging work for promotion decision (Niederhauser et al., 2004). Furthermore, publishing journal articles improves the chances of being invited to conference, and increases opportunities to review manuscripts, join advisory boards and work as consultants. In fact, it opens many doors and

networks and helps to promote one's work, skills and interests (Niederhauser et al., 2004)

The literature reviewed suggest that academic libraries develop mentoring programmes not only to advance individual career objectives but also to encourage "a culture of engagement" and "a culture of mentoring", and to create a learning organization (Li Zhang, 2009).

RESULT OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how professional and practicing librarians at the University of Ghana perceive the role of mentoring in scholarly writing and publishing in enhancing their career progression.

The gender of the overall sample was comprised of 8 (44.4%) female and 10 (55.6%) male. In the area of professional work experience, 5(27.7%) of the respondents had between 1 and 10 years' experience, while 13 (72.2%) had been in employment for more than ten (10) years. Professional Library and Information Science (LIS) qualification of respondents were as follows: 4(22.2%) of the respondents hold a Master of Arts (MA) degree; 13 (73.4%) have a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and 1 (5.5%) has a Doctorate (PhD) degree.

Though respondents agreed there are benefits derived in mentoring, both on the part of mentor and mentee, varied responses were given to set of questions that sought to find out if mentoring was right for them. Less than half 8 (44.4) respondents indicated they were prepared to share their full knowledge and experience with others. A small percentage 6 (33.3%) respondents said they were prepared to invest their time in mentoring on a regular basis. Only 3 (16.7%) respondents reported that they were currently in an informal mentoring with some colleague librarians.

Absence of mentoring culture in the library was also blamed on senior colleague librarians' unwillingness to work collaboratively with the young colleagues, as was cited by 12 (66.7%) of respondents. The finding corroborates Parker-Gibson's (2007) assertion that the opportunity to communicate and work side by side with active, engaged, and interesting colleagues who are also willing to work collaboratively enhances progress of individual faculty members. By contrast, colleague librarians who are disengaged, disenchanted or marking time until retirement can have a significant dampening effect on the progress of young librarians (Parker-Gibson, 2007). The study revealed that half, 9 (50%) of respondents appear disenchanted or marking time as they had stagnated and remained on their present grade for ten (10) or more years.

In figuring out reasons for absence of mentoring programme in the library, 8 (44.4%) of respondents blamed it on lack of vision and foresight on the part of the

library leadership and management. Some respondents, 7 (39%) attributed it to selfishness and introversion on the part of senior colleague librarians to open up in providing guidance and direction to young colleagues.). A respondent lamented that for nearly four years of her appointment she couldn't approach her immediate boss (senior colleague) to discuss issues that border on professional growth and career development. The boss was simply lousy and unaccommodating; there was lack of interpersonal chemistry between them. The finding corroborates Field's (2001) assertion that an individual does not want a mentor who is too directive, very opinionated, a negative personality, prejudiced and disorganized.

A senior librarian lamented that he had to remain on his previous rank close to fifteen (15) years before getting promoted. He attributed the stagnation in part to the absence of mentoring culture in the library. He described his first ten (10) years of employment as "wasted" where he knew very little about what went into scholarly writing and publishing, and promotion for that matter. Nearly half of the respondents, 8 (44.4%) felt that they were already overburdened with their core library workload and therefore did not want any additional obligation as mentors to fulfill.

Though respondents believe that mentoring is essential for professional development in the library, 12 (66.7%) indicated that in their view, the library did not have a mentoring culture. They described the seemingly existing mentoring practice in the library as unsatisfactory.

Concerning the need to have mentoring programme in the library, a high percentage of respondents, 10 (55.5%) opined that today's rapidly changing and challenging library and information environment/landscape has become necessary to developing mentoring programme. They further explained that such mentoring programme could provide much needed guidance, personal development and reinforce self -confidence of the mentee.

Though librarians at the University of Ghana (UG) were found to be continually writing in one form or another, the study revealed that the rate at which they were writing and publishing scholarly papers was not encouraging. A few librarians who got promoted to Senior Assistant Librarians with a couple of publications had relaxed in their publishing effort either due to the effect of "diminishing returns", advance in age, or were simply not making the effort to write and publish.

As many as 5(27.8%) of the respondents surveyed had no publication, while only 2 (11%) had more than ten (10) scholarly publications. The result of this is that, since 1995 no practicing librarian at UG has been promoted to Deputy Librarian, a position (equivalent of Associate Professor) which requires at least fifteen (15) refereed journal article publications. Many of the librarians at UG had therefore fallen short of the requirement for

promotion which has resulted in frustration and disappointment among some of the librarians.

Several factors were found to account for the inability of librarians at UG to do scholarly research and publish. Lack of confidence on the part of many librarians was observed to be a major barrier to effective scholarly writing and publishing. The results corroborate Kennedy and Brancolini (2013) who observe that confidence in one's ability to perform the discrete steps in the research process is a statistically significant predictor of a librarian conducting research and disseminating the results.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence in conducting research that has translated into publishing on scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being " Not at all confident" and 5 being "very confident". Majority of respondents 14 (77.8%) marked their confidence at between 1 and 3, while only 6 (33.3%) marked their confidence between 4 and 5, an indication that majority of practicing librarians at University of Ghana (UG) are not well grounded in research. The result corroborates Hemmings et al. (2005) assertion that confident publishers not only believe that they have something worthwhile to contribute or write about, but are also prepared to withstand any potential criticism reviewers.

The study revealed low self- efficacy in scholarly research among librarians at UG. It was not surprising therefore that many of the librarians at UG were finding it difficult to engage in scholarly writing and publishing. The result corroborates Hemmings and Kay (2010) observation that, the more self- efficacious in terms of research, the more likely an academic would produce refereed publications.

The study also revealed that no initiative or programme had been instituted to support the culture of scholarly writing and publishing among librarians at UG. One or two respondents who had made some inroads in publishing did so largely through their own individual efforts. Most of the respondents currently on the grade of Senior Librarian got promoted in earlier years when the publishing requirement was not as rigorous or dependent on publishing as in recent years.

Lack of scholarly writing and publishing was also attributed in part to non-possession of terminal (Doctorate) degree by librarians at the University of Ghana (UG). The study revealed that, with the exception of the University Librarian who was already a full professor at the time of his appointment from the Department of Information Studies, none of the practicing librarians at UG held a Doctorate degree. The finding corroborates Edem (2004) assertion that academic qualifications have positive influence on the quantity and quality of publications produced, and that librarians with Doctorates published more academic papers, journal articles, and conference and workshop papers than those with Masters and Bachelor degrees.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious that in a rapidly changing academic library environment, there is the need to establish a mentoring relationship, formal or otherwise among professionals at the University of Ghana. Such mentoring relationship will not only mitigate initial occupational challenges young professional librarians do face, but will also enhance their career progression and development.

Getting promoted as a librarian at the University of Ghana is becoming increasingly difficult as they require scholarly publications. The mentoring programme should therefore incorporate a system of helping young librarians seeking promotion and advancement in the job. Time should be set aside for new and young librarians to spend time with the other subject specialist librarians in order to learn about various resources held and utilized in the library.

Unclear publishing criteria for promoting librarians are a continuing source of anxiety to many young librarians at the University of Ghana. If the university is now using publications in peer-reviewed journals as a yardstick, this should be communicated clearly to new and young librarians.

The academic professor appointed as University Librarian should encourage practicing librarians to draw up their experiences, insight and expertise and work as mentors to develop and guide these practicing librarians rather than focus only on the physical and technical development of the library.

As a way of mitigating barriers to scholarly research and publishing, the author recommends that:

- Librarians at UG should see themselves as researchers and embrace research engagement as a core professional and institutional value.
- Librarians at UG should be encouraged to probe issues of challenge to them and turn the challenges into researchable questions and present them as seminar papers. They should form joint paper writing working/research teams to carry out surveys/ studies or prepare analytical presentation of such challenges during seminars.
- One approach to successful scholarly research and publishing is through collaboration. As a way of capacity building, the library should seek collaboration with a well-established academic library with high research and publishing outcomes. Such collaborations will help improve publishing output of librarians at UG.
- The key to research is keeping up with literature in one's subject area. Librarians could subscribe, to American Libraries Direct, Information Literacy Instruction List serve through LIS-Forum Digest, IFLA-Info serve, which provide weekly, monthly or quarterly library and technology news.

Reading the articles, summaries, posts, emails etc. could help the librarian to keep up with emerging technologies, best practices and other things happening in libraries around the world.Keeping up with the literature could allow a librarian to come up with creative topic to write about.

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