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# PUBLISHING PREFERENCES AMONG ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY AND INNOVATION

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## **PUBLISHING PREFERENCES AMONG ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY AND INNOVATION**

The purpose of this paper was to explore the factors responsible for publication preferences among a select group of researchers attending a research writing workshop in Ghana. The objectives were to investigate the specific motivations for publishing; to explore the factors that influence researchers' journal selection decisions; and availability of in-house programmes for journal publishing. The population of the study consisted of researchers from several academic institutions in Ghana who attended a research writing workshop. The research made use of the convenience sampling method to select a total of 67 researchers to participate in the study. The study used a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 13 items and analysed using the mean test, standard deviation and simple percentages. The study found that researchers consider "contribution to scholarship" as the main motivation for publishing even though job mobility is a major source of motivation. Again, the major factor influencing journal selection decision is journal reputation. However, many researchers indicated a high preference for journals that does not charge publication fees. Finally, most respondents do not benefit from in-house research development programmes. The study recommends the development of in-house academic publishing programmes that are researcher-centred; the development of new of enhancement of existing research mentoring schemes, the issuance of "standalone" low quality journals; and the need for researchers to consider both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in their quest to become quality researchers.

**KEYWORDS: ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS, INNOVATION**

## INTRODUCTION

Researchers strive to publish their research ideas, thoughts and innovations in quality journals to influence societal change and make positive contributions in their fields of endeavour. These publications form the major basis for decision-making among appointment and promotion committees. Apart from these motivations, researchers are driven by the need for self-actualisation and continually strive to have their research recognised within the communities of scholars. In addition to these inherent and professional benefits, scholarly publications may in real terms yield monetary rewards to researchers as they may use highly ranked publications to apply for research grants and travel funding (Wagner, 2012; Be'dard & Gendron, 2003). Increasingly, academic funding and staff development and planning is reliant on the number and perceived quality of academic journal publications (Villiers & Dumay, 2013). The role of scholarly publications can sometimes be far-fetched. The research output of a particular researcher may be the singular basis for taking redundancy decisions. Harzing (2010) and Englebrecht *et al.* (2008) refer to the “publish or perish” phenomenon and comment on the resulting behavioural adjustments researchers are forced to make.

Despite the fact that many researchers recognize the importance of publishing and a number of them often manage to publish their research, the choice of publishing in a highly rated journal is not always a decision they can appropriate to themselves. In certain cases, top tier journals get at least ten times as many submissions as they are able to publish, ensuring low acceptance rates (Guthrie & Parker, 2012). Consequently, researchers whose works end up being rejected by top rated journals end up publishing “anywhere” without considering the potential low impact of their research due to their publication preferences. For most academic researchers in Ghana, getting published is a *sine qua non* for promotion and tenure, as well as for personal and professional prestige, and to a large

extent a contributor to academic quality and innovation. Academic researchers in Ghana consist of academic staff such as lecturers, research fellows and librarians. In addition, researchers are also found in other professional units within academic, research and professional institutions. Consequently, this study defines researchers as academic staff of an institution of higher learning who are involved in research activities for the purpose of promoting teaching, learning, research and community service.

Even though academic researchers are expected to publish in high quality academic journals, it appears that a number of these researchers publish in low quality journals and this potentially leads to low impact of their research findings. The literature reveals that not much has been studied in relation to the reasons why academic researchers in Ghana publish in the type of journals they publish in. This study is an attempt to find out the motivations of researchers to publish in the type of journals they publish in, with the ultimate aim of contributing to solutions for improving academic research quality and innovation. The study is expected to create new knowledge and add to the existing literature on academic publishing in Ghana. The findings may be of benefit to academic and research institutions, members of appointments and promotion boards, assessors and reviewers, librarians, journal publishers and editors, as well as the researchers themselves.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to explore the factors responsible for publication preferences among a select group of researchers attending a research writing workshop in Ghana. Specifically, the study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

***RQ1:*** What factors motivate researchers to publish their research findings?

***RQ2:*** What factors influence researchers' journal selection decisions?

***RQ3:*** To what extent are in-house publishing programmes available in academic universities?

## **RELATED LITERATURE**

Researcher motivations have been influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Lwoga and Questier (2014) carried out a study to determine factors responsible for the adoption and use of the OA model by Health Sciences faculty. The study found that facilitating conditions, extrinsic benefits (professional recognition), behavioural intention and individual characteristics (professional rank, technical skills and number of publications) predicted actual usage of open access. Other contextual factors (such as attitude, and OA culture), and extrinsic benefits (academic reward, accessibility and preservation) determined behavioural intention to use OA.

Xiao and Askin (2014) examined academics' awareness of and attitudes towards Wikipedia and Open Access journals for academic publishing. The survey revealed among others that Wikipedia has perceived advantages and challenges in comparison to the Open Access model; academic researchers' increased familiarity is associated with increased comfort with these models; and the academic researchers' attitudes towards these models are associated with their familiarity, academic environment, and professional status. Many authors tend to believe that the Open Access (OA) publishing model implies an element of little or no cost (Suber, 2007), however, this is not necessarily so (Mavodza, 2013), and on the other hand, publication fee does not signify acceptance or the quality of the article.

Wagner (2012) and Sullivan et al (2013) highlight the importance of mentoring and support by suggesting guidance programmes for novice researchers regarding requirements for successful publication and the review process to improve their writing quality and increase their chances of being published. Sullivan et al (2013) for instance, suggests the benefits of writing groups such as increased publication rates, accountability, increased confidence among writers, simplifying the

research process, creating collegiality, collaboration and networking. Writing groups have been found to be beneficial and effective in this regard (McGrail et al., 2006). The impact of interventions such as writing workshops and groups can be found in the ability of authors to select the right journals for their research publication.

Sheppard (2015) also reviewed best practices for researchers' ability to get published in quality journals. He opined that to have one's research work published requires persistence, people and progress. These attributes are required in every part of the research process such as in the journal selection process. He admonishes researchers to endeavour to choose their journals based on the stated scope of their journals to assure a higher chance of acceptance. To restate, conducting and publishing research findings must, in a unique way, expand our horizons and "our understanding of the way the world works."

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researchers conducted a survey of 67 researchers from several academic institutions in Ghana who attended a research writing workshop. All the workshop attendees were selected purposively to participate in the study due to their availability and convenience for the study (Battaglia, 2008). The study used a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 13 items with the following themes: Demographics (Q1-Q4); Motivations of researchers (Q5-Q6); Factors influencing researchers' journal selection decisions (Q6-Q11); and institutional guidelines for journal publishing (Q12). The instrument used was tested for validity by five teaching staff of the second author's institution who answered the initial draft of the questionnaire and suggested some revisions which were incorporated thereafter. The study made use of the mean test, standard deviation and simple percentages with the results presented in cross-tabulation.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### Demographics

**Table 1: Background of respondents**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	24	35.8
Male	43	64.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Average number of engaged in publication</b>		
1 – 4 years	34	50.0
5 – 9 years	24	36.4
10 – 14 years	3	4.5
Over 15 years	6	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Respondents' Institution</b>		
UG	9	13.2
UCC	11	16.2
UEW	20	30.9
KNUST	13	19.1
OTHERS	14	20.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field survey data, 2015*

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents surveyed. The responses on gender indicates that more than half of the respondents were males (n=43, 64.2%), however, females constituted 24 (35.8%). On the average publishing experience of respondents, the results show that 34 (50.7%) of the respondents have been involved in publishing for less than 4 years, whereas 24 comprising 36.4% of the respondents have published for at least 5 years but not more than 9 years. A smaller percentage (4.5% and 9.1%) had also published for “10-14” and “over 15” years respectively.

In relation to the publishing profile of respondents, the study further revealed that nearly two-thirds (n=50, 74.6%) of the respondents reported they publish their research findings. On the other hand, 17 (25.4%) of the respondents maintained they do not publish their research findings. The institutional profile of respondents revealed that out of the total number sampled, 21 of the

respondents representing 30.9% were from the University of Education Winneba (UEW), whereas 13 (19.1%) were staff of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), 11(16.2%) works at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), and 9 (13.2%) were from the University of Ghana (UG). Lastly, 14 (20.6%) respondents were from several higher educational institutions in Ghana including, private universities and Colleges of Education. Some of these are Ashesi University, Valley View University, Kaaf University College, Accra College of Education, Institute of Professional Studies, Ghana School of Law, Mount Mary College of Education, Agogo College of Education etc.

### Motivations for publishing

**Table 2: Frequencies and Mean scores for the reasons why respondents publish their research findings**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>±SD</b>
Contribution towards scholarship	48	30.3	0.72	.454
Job Promotion/Upward Mobility	45	28.5	0.68	.469
Marketability	36	22.8	0.54	.502
Prestige	29	18.5	0.42	.497
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>		

*Source: Field survey data, 2015*

Table 2 presents the frequencies and mean rankings for the reasons why respondents publish their research findings. From Table 2 it could be observed that ‘Contribution towards Scholarship’ received the highest rating of 48 respondents comprising 30.3% of the total responses opting for this option hence obtained the highest mean score ( $M=0.72$ ,  $\pm SD=.454$ ). Furthermore, Job Promotion/Upward Mobility received the next highest of responses from the respondents as 45 respondents being 28.5% ( $M=0.68$ ,  $\pm SD=.469$ ) of the respondents stated it is one of their reasons for publishing their research findings. Also, 36 respondents comprising 22.8% of the respondents reported it is because they want to remain ‘Marketable’ in the world of academia that is why they

publish their research findings ( $M=0.54, \pm SD=.502$ ). Additionally, 29 (18.5%) of the respondents stated they publish because of the ‘Prestige’ that come along with it ( $M=0.42, \pm SD=.497$ ).

### Factors responsible for researchers’ journal selection decisions

**Table 3: Frequencies and Mean rankings for factors that influence researcher’s journal selection decisions**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean	$\pm SD$
Journal reputation	61	19.6	0.90	.308
Open Access or subscription access	57	18.3	0.85	.359
Journal is free to publish	56	17.9	0.84	.373
Journal acceptance rate	46	14.7	0.69	.467
Journal is online	32	10.3	0.48	.503
Journal Indexing	27	8.7	0.40	.494
Journal publication frequency	33	10.6	0.49	.504
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100</b>		

*Source: Field survey data, 2015*

Table 3 is a summary of the responses of the respondents in relation to the factors that influence their journal selection decisions. The responses indicate that the respondents prefer to publish in journals with the factor of ‘Journal Reputation’ ( $n=61, 19.6\%$ ). This factor ranked highest with a mean and standard deviation of ( $M=0.90, \pm SD=.308$ ). Another factor that influences their decision concerns whether a journal is ‘Open Access or subscription access’ which also received 57 responses (18.3%) with a mean ranking of ( $M=0.85, \pm SD=.359$ ). Another major influencing factor is the publication cost, that is a particular journal “...free to publish with’ which also obtained the third highest response of 56 (17.9%). In addition, the ‘Journal acceptance rate also influences researchers’ journal selection decisions ( $n=46, 14.7\%$ ) with a mean and standard deviation score of ( $M=0.69, \pm SD=.467$ ).

**Table 4: Influencers of journal selection decision**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Topic fits in scope of journal	16	23.9
Recommendation from colleague	36	53.7
Recommendation from Librarian	11	16.4
Recommendation from supervisor	3	4.5
Unsolicited mail from online publisher	1	1.5

*Source: Field survey data, 2015*

The respondents were requested to indicate how they decide with regards to selecting a journal to publish in. Table 4 shows that about half (n=36, 53.7%) of the respondents actually select their journals based on recommendations from colleagues whereas 16 (23.9%) do their selection based on whether the topic fits in the scope of the journal. More so, 11 (16.4%) choose their journal for publication based on recommendations from their Librarians.

#### **Availability of in-house publishing programmes**

**Table 5: Does your library or institution have an in-house training programme on academic publishing?**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Yes	21	31.3
No	46	68.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field survey data, 2015*

From Table 7, the respondents were asked to indicate whether their libraries or institutions have training programmes on academic publishing. The responses suggest that more than half (n=46, 68.7%) have no such programmes in their institutions or libraries. However, 21 (31.3%) of the respondents indicated that they have in-house academic publishing programmes.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The paper explored the factors responsible for journal selection decisions among selected academic researchers in a writing workshop in Ghana. The study investigated the factors responsible for author decisions to publish; the factors that influence researchers' journal selection decisions; and the availability of in-house academic publishing programmes for researchers. The results of the study indicate that an overwhelming majority (74.6%) of the population publish their research findings in academic journals. The findings of the study also show that many of the respondents have attained an appreciable level of publishing experience having published as part of their work for at least five years. However, the results also indicate that majority of the respondents are relatively younger researchers.

The results further reveal that many (30.3%) researchers in this study consider scholarly publication as a means of expanding the frontiers of knowledge through their empirical contribution to their fields of study (Sheppard, 2015). Furthermore, in addition to the desire to contribute to knowledge, respondents indicated other motivations for publishing such as "job promotion" (28.5%) and "marketability" (22.8%) making an overall total of 81.6%. These are extrinsic factors related to monetary rewards. Implicit in this finding is that a majority of researchers are motivated to publish due to the financial rewards following promotions or appointments. However, monetary rewards are just one of extrinsic factors, and researchers must therefore look at intrinsic factors such as the satisfaction of providing a solution to a genuine problem.

The findings also show that researchers are more likely to publish in a journal due to its reputation more than other factors such as whether a journal is "Open Access" or a subscription journal and most interestingly, if a "journal is free to publish" in. What is not clear is whether authors know the factors that constitute journal reputation. Notwithstanding, reputation of journals which one publishes in has ramifications for research quality and innovation (Wagner, 2012). This is because a

reputable journal is likely to have a wider readership and consequently a high impact factor. A journal with a high impact factor publishes articles of high quality, and journals of high impact are indexed in quality journal indexes such as the Social Science Citation Index, which consequently gives a wider readership to the article. In the academic and research contexts, articles that are published in such high impact factor journals and are indexed in quality indexing sites are also likely to be considered for the purposes of appointments and promotion. The implication of this finding is that researchers must make concerted efforts to publish their articles in journals of high value.

Another interesting finding is that many authors believe the rate at which a journal is accepted is an important factor in their choice of journals. This issue of acceptance rate is important to some researchers as some have expressed frustration at the rejection rate of some top-tier journals in their field. This result is confirmed by Guthrie and Parker (2012) who note that top tier journals receive at least ten times as many submissions as they are able to publish, and thus low acceptance rates. It is the view of the present authors that journal acceptance rate may be related to journal quality and reputation. Consequently, researchers must not shun journals with low acceptance rates as their rigorous peer-review results may prove invaluable to making an initially rejected article very good subsequently.

The study also sought to find major influencers of journal selection decisions of authors. The study found out that most (53.7%) respondents considered the opinion of a colleague in selecting a journal to publish over and above other factors. Even though a recommendation from a colleague is important in certain cases, it is interesting to find that a few (23.9%) of the respondents verify if their topic fits the scope of a target journal. A significant concern of editors and reviewers is that prospective authors of a target journal do not bother to verify the journal's scope and aims before their submission (Ahlstrom, Brutton & Zhao, 2013). Following submission guidelines to fit a journal article into a journal's focus is however not a sine qua non for acceptance into journals, especially in

quality journals (Villiers & Dumay, 2013) as the article may also be defective in some area such as lack of empirical rigour (Sheppard, 2015).

Furthermore, in addressing institutional interventions to improve the research skills of authors in general and journal selection in particular, the results indicate that most (68.7%) participants of the study do not benefit from their institutional libraries' expertise on journal selection and general information on publication of scholarly works. Increasingly, academic libraries specialise in providing support for knowledge creation and publishing (Lewis, 2010) Even though academic institutions have occasional programmes on academic research publishing, academic libraries have an opportunity to take a centre piece in the drive towards innovation through research. The introduction of writing groups in academic and research institutions by academic libraries is important to increase publication rates among researchers (Haas, 2012). Also, the development of in-house training workshops is an important first step towards increasing the research output of researchers. Such programmes are unique because they are researcher-centred programmes that address the peculiar research needs of researchers. In-house research training programmes need not be hosted in or organised by the institution, the emphasis on this approach is that researchers indicate their own unique research problems and these are addressed in the programme.

## **CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors responsible for publication preferences among a select group of researchers attending a research writing workshop in Ghana. The study was not an exhaustive study of their publication preferences but an exploratory one designed to identify areas of potential knowledge gaps and weaknesses. For instance, researchers' perception of the factors determining journal quality requires further probing, just as the kind of in-house programmes for training in academic publishing.

Based on the findings of the survey, the following recommendations- with implications for academic institutions, libraries and researchers- are proposed to improve on the quality of research in academic and research institutions in Ghana to position these institutions to effectively contribute to academic quality and innovation through the publication of good and quality research:

- Academic and research institutions must develop in-house writing and research training programmes that formally address the peculiar research needs of their staff. These programmes must be backed by policy and be essentially researcher-driven.
- Young researchers must be mentored by experienced colleagues in research and specifically in academic publishing. This further implies that academic institutions must develop new or enhance existing research mentoring schemes.
- Academic libraries must be proactive by developing and issuing a periodic list of “predatory” low quality journals that are likely to attract unsuspecting prospective authors to publish their research findings in them. These “standalone” journals must be referred to by members of appointments and promotions boards in their considerations of what constitute a good publication.
- Finally, researchers must not only be motivated by extrinsic factors such as the monetary rewards that come from academic publishing but they must also consider intrinsic factors such as a genuine desire to conduct research and thereby enable them to become quality researchers.

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