

LECTURERS' PERCEPTION ON ACADEMIC CONFERENCES IN NIGERIA: BENEFITS AND ROLES IN RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

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Abstract

The study examined the perception of lecturers on the benefits and roles of Academic Conferences in research and professional development of lecturers. The study also reviewed some literature in related areas by delves into the multifaceted benefits of academic conferences within the Nigerian context, encompassing enhanced research collaboration, capacity building, and networking opportunities. Furthermore, the study investigates the challenges that hinder effective conference organization and participation in Nigeria. By understanding these dynamics, this paper seeks to underscore the importance of academic conferences in fostering a vibrant academic environment that can contribute to national and global development. The study adopted a survey research method, a randomly selected population sample of 600 lecturers comprising of 300 male and 300 female respectively. Two research questions and a null hypothesis guided the study and was tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The research instrument used for data collection is a 4 point rating scale, The instrument was validated by three specialist; two in educational management and planning and one from education measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.78 using cronnbach alpha statistics. Mean rating was used to answer the two research questions while t-test of simple linear correlation statistic was used to test the hypothesis. Among the findings of the study were that both male and female lecturers agreed to the four item benefits of academic conferences as; Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange, Networking and Collaboration, Capacity Building and Professional Development, Elevation of Institutional Prestige and ten item roles as; Networking opportunities, Interdisciplinary dialogue, Workshops and

training sessions, Presentation of research ideas, Establishment of research networks, Access to funding opportunities, Showcasing success stories, Mentorship and guidance, Follow-up and continuation, Cultural exchange and understanding. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended adequate funding of academic conferences by the relevant authorities and implementation of resolutions of the researchers and more.

KEYWORDS: Academic Conferences, Research and Professional Development.

Introduction

Academic conferences are formal gatherings where scholars convene to present research findings, engage in discursive dialogues, and forge collaborative networks. The theoretical underpinnings of such conferences are rooted in the principles of knowledge dissemination, peer review, and scholarly interaction. In Nigeria, the manifestation of these conferences is often influenced by local socio-cultural and economic contexts, necessitating a tailored understanding of their operational dynamics. According to Amoke, (2020), Academic conferences are integral to the fabric of scholarly communication and professional growth. They provide a venue where researchers, practitioners, and students can convene to discuss their findings, exchange ideas, and explore collaborative opportunities. In an increasingly interconnected world, conferences facilitate the sharing of knowledge across borders, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration. In Nigeria, a nation with a rich tapestry of cultures and a rapidly developing academic landscape, conferences have emerged as critical platforms for enhancing research output, promoting professional development, and facilitating networking among scholars.

Benefits of Academic Conferences in Nigeria

The advantages of academic conferences in Nigeria according to Obizue (2022), can be categorized into several distinct domains, each contributing significantly to the advancement of scholarship

and the enhancement of the academic landscape within the country. This section elaborates on four primary benefits: knowledge dissemination and exchange, networking and collaboration, capacity building and professional development, and the elevation of institutional prestige.

Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange

Academic conferences serve as vital platforms for the dissemination of cutting-edge research, playing a crucial role in the academic ecosystem. Scholars from various disciplines come together to present their empirical findings, theoretical explorations, and innovative methodologies. This exchange of ideas not only enriches the collective knowledge base but also promotes a culture of critical inquiry and intellectual engagement among participants. In the Nigerian context, where access to contemporary research can often be hindered by infrastructural constraints, the importance of such platforms cannot be overstated. Many researchers operate in environments where access to the latest journals, databases, and academic resources is limited. Conferences thus become essential venues for sharing recent developments and breakthroughs in various fields. By presenting their work, scholars can disseminate their findings to a broader audience, ensuring that new knowledge reaches those who can benefit from it, including practitioners, policymakers, and fellow researchers. Moreover, the discussions and debates that ensue during these conferences often lead to the identification of gaps in the existing literature, prompting further research initiatives and encouraging attendees to explore under-researched areas. This dynamic process of knowledge exchange fosters an environment where innovative ideas can flourish, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of scholarship within Nigeria.

Networking and Collaboration

The collegial atmosphere of academic conferences fosters ample networking opportunities, enabling scholars to forge meaningful relationships and interdisciplinary collaborations. The informal interactions that occur during breaks and social events provide a conducive environment for participants to engage with one another, share their experiences, and discuss potential areas for collaboration. Such partnerships can lead to the co-creation of joint research initiatives, collaborative grant applications, and the co-authoring of publications, thereby enhancing the academic output of Nigerian institutions. The ability to network effectively can significantly impact a researcher's career trajectory. Through these connections, scholars can access resources, mentorship, and support systems that may not be available within their own institutions. Additionally, networking at conferences can facilitate the establishment of research groups that cut across disciplines, promoting a multi-faceted approach to tackling complex societal challenges. This collaborative spirit is particularly important in Nigeria, where interdisciplinary research is essential for addressing the multifarious issues facing the nation, such as health crises, educational shortcomings, and economic development. (Offorma, 2019).

Capacity Building and Professional Development

Participating in academic conferences also facilitates professional development, equipping scholars with essential skills pertinent to their research endeavors. Many conferences feature workshops, plenary sessions, and keynote addresses that focus on emerging trends in research methodologies, data analysis, academic writing, and the use of modern technological tools. These sessions not only provide valuable insights but also empower participants with practical skills that enhance their research capabilities. In a rapidly evolving academic landscape,

continuous professional development is paramount. Conferences offer a unique opportunity for Nigerian academics to learn from leading experts in their fields, thereby keeping abreast of the latest advancements and best practices. Furthermore, the skills acquired during these events often translate into improved research quality and output, which can have a lasting impact on the individual scholar's career and the broader academic community. By investing in the professional growth of researchers, academic conferences contribute to building a more competent and competitive academic workforce in Nigeria. This, in turn, enhances the overall research productivity of institutions, as scholars become better equipped to engage in high-quality research that meets international standards.

Elevation of Institutional Prestige

The hosting of international conferences can significantly elevate the prestige of Nigerian academic institutions. When prominent scholars and researchers from around the world convene in Nigeria for a conference, it enhances the visibility of local research and positions Nigerian universities as key players in the global academic arena. Such events not only attract attention to the hosting institutions but also foster pride and motivation among local scholars who are given the opportunity to share their work on an international stage. The elevation of institutional prestige has several implications. Firstly, it can lead to increased funding opportunities, as institutions that are recognized for hosting significant academic events may attract sponsorships and partnerships from both local and international organizations. Secondly, the visibility gained through hosting international conferences can enhance student recruitment efforts, drawing in both local and foreign students eager to learn in a vibrant academic environment. Lastly, elevated prestige often leads to enhanced collaboration opportunities with other

institutions, both nationally and internationally. This can further enrich the academic landscape by promoting exchange programs, joint research projects, and faculty collaborations that bolster the quality and reach of research conducted in Nigeria. Academic conferences in Nigeria offer a myriad of benefits that extend beyond mere knowledge exchange. They play a crucial role in fostering networking and collaboration, enhancing capacity building and professional development, and elevating the prestige of academic institutions. As Nigeria continues to navigate its unique challenges and opportunities within the global academic community, the importance of these conferences will only grow. By leveraging the advantages offered by academic conferences, Nigerian scholars can contribute to a more robust and dynamic academic environment that not only addresses local challenges but also positions the nation as a significant player in the global academic arena.

The Role of Interdisciplinary Dialogues at Conferences in Driving Innovation in Research

Obizue (2022), opined that interdisciplinary dialogues at conferences serve as a vital catalyst for innovation in research, enabling scholars from various fields to converge and share their unique insights, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks. This interaction fosters a rich environment where diverse perspectives can flourish, ultimately leading to novel insights and innovative approaches to complex problems. One of the primary benefits of interdisciplinary dialogues is the cross-pollination of ideas. When researchers from different disciplines engage in discussions, they have the opportunity to exchange concepts and methodologies that may not typically be explored within their own fields. This exchange encourages scholars to adopt and adapt innovative ideas, leading to the development of new research questions and methodologies that blend various areas of expertise. Such

collaborative engagement can yield transformative outcomes that push the boundaries of traditional research.

Furthermore, Ukaiwe (2019), added that interdisciplinary dialogues play a crucial role in identifying overlapping challenges that many contemporary issues present, such as climate change, public health, and technological advancement. These multifaceted problems often require collaborative solutions that transcend disciplinary boundaries. By bringing together researchers from diverse backgrounds, conferences help to illuminate common challenges and prompt collaborative efforts to devise comprehensive strategies that address these complexities. The collaborative nature of interdisciplinary discussions enhances problem-solving capabilities. Participants can approach challenges from multiple angles, engaging in collective brainstorming that can yield creative solutions. This multifaceted approach often proves to be more effective than solutions developed within the confines of a single discipline, as it allows for a broader exploration of potential outcomes and methodologies. Moreover, engaging with scholars from different fields can inspire researchers to explore new directions in their own work. Exposure to fresh ideas, methodologies, and perspectives encourages researchers to formulate innovative hypotheses and pursue research avenues they may not have previously considered. This inspiration is essential for fostering a culture of innovation within academia.

According to Ibe, (2018), Interdisciplinary dialogues also promote the development of holistic approaches to research problems. By integrating insights from various disciplines, researchers can create comprehensive frameworks that address the complexities of real-world issues. This integration not only enriches individual research projects but also drives innovation

across multiple fields, contributing to the advancement of knowledge.

According to Okike (2018), the formation of collaborative projects and initiatives is another significant outcome of interdisciplinary dialogues at conferences. These interactions often lead to the establishment of research teams that encompass multiple disciplines, leveraging their collective expertise to undertake ambitious projects. Such collaborations can result in innovative findings and contributions to knowledge that a single discipline might overlook. Additionally, the supportive environment fostered by interdisciplinary discussions encourages researchers to take intellectual risks and explore unconventional ideas. This willingness to experiment is crucial for innovation, as it often leads to groundbreaking discoveries that challenge existing paradigms. Access to funding and resources is another advantage of interdisciplinary collaborations. Projects that span multiple disciplines may attract funding from a broader range of sources, including governmental and non-governmental organizations that support collaborative research initiatives. The pooling of resources from different fields can enhance the scope and scale of research projects, further fostering innovation. Offorma (2021), added that regular interdisciplinary dialogues help to build a culture of collaboration within the academic community. As researchers become accustomed to working across disciplinary boundaries, they are more likely to pursue innovative collaborations in their future work. This culture of collaboration nurtures an environment where innovative ideas can thrive, ultimately benefiting the entire academic community. In conclusion, interdisciplinary dialogues at conferences are instrumental in driving innovation in research. By fostering diverse perspectives, encouraging the cross-pollination of ideas, and promoting holistic problem-solving approaches, these

interactions enhance individual research projects and contribute to the advancement of knowledge across various fields. As scholars continue to engage in interdisciplinary discussions, they will be better equipped to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time, paving the way for a more innovative and collaborative future in research.

Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of academic conferences, several challenges hinder their effectiveness in Nigeria. Issues such as inadequate funding, logistical constraints, and limited participation from various demographics often plague conference organization. Additionally, there is a noticeable gap between academia and industry, which reduces the impact of research findings on societal development. Furthermore, the digital divide in Nigeria presents challenges for virtual participation, limiting opportunities for broader engagement. These issues raise critical questions about how to enhance the efficacy of academic conferences in promoting scholarly exchange and professional development in the Nigerian context. The study seeks to examine the benefits and roles of academic conferences to research and professional development in Nigeria,

Research Questions

Two research questions were formulated to guide the studies:

1. What are the benefits of academic conferences to lecturers for research and professional development in Nigeria?
2. What are the roles of academic conferences in facilitating research collaboration, capacity building and knowledge sharing among Nigerian scholars?

Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was postulated to guide the study;

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the benefits and roles of academic

conferences to lecturers for research and professional development.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate the critical role of academic conferences in Nigeria's academic landscape. By identifying the benefits, roles and challenges associated with these events, this research can provide valuable insights for policymakers, academic institutions, and conference organizers. Understanding the dynamics of academic conferences can lead to improved strategies for organizing such events, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to scholarly exchange and professional growth. Additionally, the findings may contribute to enhancing Nigeria's position in the global academic arena, promoting collaboration that transcends national boundaries.

Methods

The study adopted a survey research method, a randomly selected population sample of 600 lecturers comprising of 300 male and 300 female respectively. Two research questions and a null hypothesis guided the study and was tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The research instrument used for data collection is a 4 point rating scale, The instrument was validated by three specialist; two in educational management and planning and one from education measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.78 using cronbach alpha statistics. Mean rating was used to answer the two research questions while t-test of simple linear correlation statistic was used to test the hypothesis.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the benefits of academic conferences to lecturer for research and professional development in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the benefits of academic conferences to lectures for research and professional development in Nigeria?

	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD	Decision
THE BENEFITS OF ACADEMIC CONFERENCES FOR RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT							
1 Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange	300	220	50	30	4.6	0.82	Agree
2. Networking and Collaboration	340	200	30	30	4.8	0.84	Agree
3. Capacity Building and Professional Development	310	250	20	20	4.2	0.80	Agree
4. Elevation of Institutional Prestige	300	220	40	40	4.7	0.81	Agree
Grand Total					4.6	0.82	

Table 1: shows a very high mean rating by the respondents to the items listed. This means that both male and female lecturers agreed to the items listed above as benefits of academic conferences to lecturers for research and professional development. The grand mean of 4.6 and SD of 0.82 was obtained for all the four items, Thus indicating that the respondents generally agree with all the items as benefits of academic conferences to lecturers for research and professional development.

Research Question 2:

In what ways do academic conferences contribute to capacity building and professional development?

HOW ACADEMIC CONFERENCES CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD	Disagree
1. Networking opportunities	320	240	30	10	4.4	0.78	Agree
2. Interdisciplinary dialogue	360	220	10	10	4.9	0.85	Agree
3. Workshops and training sessions	320	240	30	10	4.4	0.78	Agree
4. Presentation of research ideas	300	230	40	30	4.8	0.85	Agree
5. Establishment of research networks	310	260	20	10	4.1	0.76	Agree
6. Access to funding opportunities	300	220	50	30	4.6	0.83	Agree
7. Showcasing success stories	340	200	40	20	4.9	0.86	Agree
8. Mentorship and guidance	330	250	10	10	4.8	0.85	Agree
9. Follow-up and continuation	330	250	10	10	4.8	0.85	Agree
10. Cultural exchange and understanding	330	250	10	10	4.8	0.85	Agree
Grand mean and SD					4.7	0.82	

Table 2: shows a very high mean rating by the respondents to the items listed. This means that both male and female lecturers agreed to the items listed above. The grand mean of 4.7 and SD of 0.82 was obtained for all the ten items, Thus indicating that the respondents generally agree with all the items as contributing to capacity building and professional development?

Testing of Hypotheses.

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the benefits and roles of academic conferences to lecturers for research and professional development.

Table 3: *t-test of difference between the mean rating of male and female lecturers on the benefits and roles of academic conferences to researchers and professionals.*

Respondents	N	x	SD	df	t-cal	t-Crit	Decision
Male lecturers	300	4.6	0.82	166	0.85	+1.96	Not Significant
Female lecturers	300	4.7	0.81				

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value at 0.05 of significance and 166 degree of freedom is 0.85 while the critical or table value is + 1.96. Since the calculated value of t is less than critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore, not rejected. This means that no significant difference exists between the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the benefits and roles of academic conferences to researchers and professionals.

Discussion

The study reveals that the academic conferences in Nigeria are multifaceted, complex and has benefits and roles towards research and professional development. This finding is in line with the assertion of Ike, (2020), academic conferences are vital for nurturing a vibrant academic environment in Nigeria, contributing not only to individual scholars' growth but also to the nation's broader educational development. By recognizing and addressing the challenges inherent in organizing and participating in these events, stakeholders can ensure

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that academic conferences fulfill their potential as transformative platforms for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovation. The finding of the research is in line with the suggestion of Amoke, (2020), the roles of academic conferences as the following; Networking opportunities, Interdisciplinary dialogue, Workshops and training sessions, Presentation of research ideas, Establishment of research networks, Access to funding opportunities, Showcasing success stories, Mentorship and guidance, Follow-up and continuation, Cultural exchange and understanding, Access to funding opportunities, Showcasing success stories, Mentorship and guidance, Follow-up and continuation, Cultural exchange and understanding .

As Nigeria strives to enhance its academic reputation on the global stage, the importance of these conferences will only continue to grow, making it imperative to cultivate an inclusive, supportive, and dynamic academic culture. Obizue (2022), added that hosting of international conferences can significantly elevate the prestige of Nigerian academic institutions. When prominent scholars and researchers from around the world convene in Nigeria for a conference, it enhances the visibility of local research and positions Nigerian universities as key players in the global academic arena. Such events not only attract attention to the hosting institutions but also foster pride and motivation among local scholars who are given the opportunity to share their work on an international stage. The elevation of institutional prestige has several implications.

Conclusion

In summary, academic conferences in Nigeria play a critical role in shaping the scholarly landscape by facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration, and enhancing professional development among researchers. This researcher has examined the multifaceted benefits of these conferences, emphasizing their significance as platforms for innovation, networking, and the elevation of institutional prestige. Through

the lens of various case studies and qualitative insights, it is evident that academic conferences not only contribute to the dissemination of research but also serve as incubators for collaborative initiatives that address pressing national challenges. However, the realities of organizing and participating in academic conferences in Nigeria are fraught with challenges, including inadequate funding, logistical constraints, limited participation, and the digital divide. These obstacles hinder the effectiveness of conferences and can prevent a diverse range of scholars from fully engaging in the academic discourse. To enhance the impact of these events, it is essential to implement targeted strategies that address these challenges, such as securing diverse funding sources, improving logistical support, promoting wider participation, and bridging the digital divide.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary dialogues at conferences emerge as a powerful mechanism for driving innovation in research. By bringing together scholars from various fields, these discussions promote the cross-pollination of ideas, inspire new research directions, and encourage holistic approaches to complex problems. As scholars continue to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations, they can leverage diverse perspectives to tackle the multifaceted issues facing Nigeria and the global community. Ultimately, academic conferences are vital for nurturing a vibrant academic environment in Nigeria, contributing not only to individual scholars' growth but also to the nation's broader educational development. By recognizing and addressing the challenges inherent in organizing and participating in these events, stakeholders can ensure that academic conferences fulfill their potential as transformative platforms for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovation. As Nigeria strives to enhance its academic reputation on the global stage, the importance of these conferences will only continue to grow,

making it imperative to cultivate an inclusive, supportive, and dynamic academic culture.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researchers recommended following;

1. Adequate funding of academic conferences by the relevant authorities
2. Implementation of resolutions of the researchers after an academic conference
3. Provision of digital facilities for academic conferences
4. International collaboration in the organization of academic conferences.

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