# Conference/Workshop Attendance by Librarians: Benefits, Challenges, and Prospects

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*ABSTRACT: This paper discussed the benefits, challenges, and prospects of librarians attending conferences or workshops. A survey research design was adopted and a questionnaire was used for data collection. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to 64 librarians at a conference. 53 completed copies were returned and used for data analysis. The study revealed that librarians derived many benefits from conference or workshop attendance, such as it enables them to remain up-to-date, acquire new skills, network with colleagues, develop article writing and presentation skills, and so on. The challenges that librarians encountered included high cost of conference registration fees, lack of sponsorship, and unawareness. The paper concluded that conference or workshop attendance by librarians is not a matter of choice but a must if they want to remain relevant and up-to-date in the information age.*

## I. Introduction

A conference is a formal meeting or gathering where people of like mind converge to share ideas and make policies that will be beneficial to their field of study. A conference can also be a gathering where a group of people from different walks of life with common interest converge to share ideas, present problems in their field, and proffer solutions.

One definition of "conference", according to The Free Dictionary by Farlex, is "a formal meeting of two or more states, political groups, etc, esp to discuss differences or formulate common policy".

International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) defines a conference as a "participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation. As compared with a congress, a conference is normally smaller in scale and more select in character - features which tend to facilitate the exchange of information" (ICCA, 2014).

The Macmillan Dictionary defines a conference as "a large meeting, often lasting a few days, where people who are interested in a particular subject come together to discuss ideas".

The inference that can be drawn from all of these different definitions is that a conference involves people coming together to discuss issues, solve problems, or share ideas.

Librarians attend library conferences to learn about current events, trends, and technology, to participate in continuing education, and to build networks. The knowledge acquired at conferences is necessary for professional development. Conferences bring professionals of like minds together to share and discuss ideas. Conference attendance helps to cultivate research ideas through conference papers, presentations, and question and answer sessions. Conference attendance is part of professional capacity building.

## II. Literature Review

Eke (2011) opined that "conferences are filled with presentations which are followed by discussion". She added that "the difference between a conference and workshop is the number of attendees involved. A large meeting is usually called a conference while a smaller one is termed a workshop".

eVenues.com asserts that "A conference is generally understood as a meeting of several people to discuss a particular topic" and "differs from the others in terms of size and purpose".

On the other hand, a "workshop" as defined by *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*"is an educational seminar or series of meetings emphasizing interaction and exchange of information among a usually small number of participants". Business Dictionary.com defines a workshop as a "training class or seminar in which the participants work individually and/or in groups to solve actual work related tasks to gain hands-on experience".

One major point that can be deduced from all of these definitions above is that a conference is different from a workshop in the sense that the activities involved in each differ. While a keynote speaker delivers a keynote address in a conference, a workshop does not have a keynote speaker or keynote address delivered.

Harris (2003) reported that conference attendance enables librarians to learn and update their skills.

Ernst (2004) revealed that "attending a conference is a professionally rewarding experience" and it enables participants to socialize with colleagues from other institutions and also "to converse with other researchers". He further stressed that "listening to presentations will inform you of

what others are doing" and this will eventually "inspire research ideas of your own". Attending conferences will also expose the participants to different styles of presentation (Ernst, 2004.

Conferences are primarily organized by professional organizations or academic disciplines to further discussions within their groups (Tomaszewski & MacDonald, 2009).

Conference attendance enables the participants to share research findings, discuss emerging trends in the discipline, interact with experts in the fields, develop publishing and presentation opportunities, and build networks (Hankins, Melgoza, Seeger & Wan, 2009).

In a study conducted on librarians' attitudes toward conferences, Vega and Connell (2007) found out that conference attendance enables the participants to have professional rejuvenation, give new life to a career that sometimes gets old, and enables the participants to reconnect with old friends. It also gives new life to work and helps the individual to network.

Conferences provide platform for delegates to share experiences, learn from each other also learn best practices in the profession (Olubola, 2007)

The Nigeria Library Association (NLA) organizes annual conference. NLA has 12 special interest sections:

- Academic and Research Libraries (ARL)
- Association of Government  Libraries (AGOL)
- Association of News media Librarians  of Nigeria (ANLON)
- Association of Women Librarians of Nigeria (AWLIN)
- Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing (CAT&CLASS)
- Nigeria Association of Law Libraries (NALL)
- Library and Information Science Teachers (LIST)
- Public Libraries (PL)
- Information Technology (IT)
- Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA)
- Association of Libraries for visually handicapped (ALVH)
- Preservation and Conservation (PC)

Each of these sections also organizes annual conference/workshop.

Apart from these sections, the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) organizes workshops for librarians at regular intervals.

Adomi, Alakpocha, and Akporhonor (2006) opined that conference attendance enables librarian to remain up to date and maintain their skills base, They further explained that conference attendance enables the librarians acquire new ideas, get new skills, remain current, and build networks with other librarians.

## III. Problem Statement

All over the world, including Nigeria, librarians attend conferences every year. The question is: what are the benefits they will gain from attending conferences, as it seems costly to attend conferences.

## IV. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to find out:

- Need for librarians to attend conferences
- Number of conferences that librarians attend annually
- Benefits of conference attendance by librarians
- Challenges to conference attendance by librarians
- Solutions to these challenges

## V. Research Methodology

Survey research design was used for this study. A questionnaire was the instrument used to collect the data. The survey population was all 64 librarians attending a workshop. Of the 64 copies of the questionnaires administered, 53 were completed and returned. The response rate was 82.8%.

## VI. Data Analysis and Interpretation

*Table 1.* Gender of respondents

| Gender of respondents | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 31 | 58.5% |
| Female | 22 | 41.5% |
| Total | 53 | 100% |

Table 1 shows that 31 (58.5%) of the respondents are male and that 22 (41.5%) are female.

*Table 2.* Need for librarians to attend conference

| There is need for librarians to attend conferences/workshops. | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 53 | 100% |
| No | - | - |
| Total | 53 | 100% |

Table 2 shows that all 53 (100%) respondents indicated that librarians need to attend conferences or workshops.

*Table 3*. Number of conferences/workshops that respondents attend in a year

| How many conference /workshop do you normally attend in a year | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 42 | 79.2% |
| 2 | 9 | 17.0% |
| 3 | 2 | 3.8% |
| 4 and above | - | - |
| Total | 53 | 100% |

Table3 shows that 42 (79.2%) of the respondents attend a conference or workshop once a year, 9 (17.0%) attend twice a year, 2 (3.8%) attend three times a year, and no respondents attend four times or more.

*Table 4*. Benefits of conference/workshop attendance

| Benefits of conference/workshop attendance | Strongly Agree (SA) | Agree (A) | Undecided (UD) | Disagree (DA) | Strongly Disagree (SDA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remain up-to-date | 37 (69.811%) | 16 (30.189%) | - | - | - |
| Acquire new ideas | 24 (45.28%) | 29 (54.72%) | - | - | - |
| Network with other librarians | 53 (100%) | - | - | - | - |
| Socialize with colleagues | 8 (15.10%) | 12 (22.64%) | 18 (33.96%) | 15 (28.30%) | - |
| Inspire research ideas | 44 (83.02%) | 9 (16.98%) | - | - | - |
| Share research findings | 53 (100%) | - | - | - | - |
| Discuss emerging trends in the profession | 32 (60.38%) | 21 (39.62%) | - | - | - |
| Opportunity to interact with experts in the profession | 41 (77.35%) | 10 (18.86%) | 2 (3.80%) | - | - |
| Develop publishing and presentation opportunities | 33 (62.3%) | 20 (37.7%) | - | - | - |
| Capacity building | 49 (92.5%) | 4 (7.5%) | - | - | - |
| Professional rejuvenation | 34 (64.2%) | 16 (30.2%) | 3 (5.7%) | ＼ | - |
| Professional development | 53 (100%) | - | - | - | - |
| Continuing education | 22 (41.5%) | 27 (51%) | 4 (7.5%) | - | - |

| Collaboration | 47 (88.7%) | 6 (11.3%) | - | - | - |
| Opportunity to share experiences | 25 (47.2%) | 20 (37.7%) | 5 (9.4%) | 3 (5.7%) | - |
| Motivation | 9 (17.0%) | 36 (67.9%) | 2 (3.8%) | 6 (11.3%) | - |
| Collection development | 18 (33.96%) | 21 (39.6%) | 11 (20.75%) | 3 (5.7%) | - |

Table 4 shows various benefits the respondents have gained from attending conferences or workshops.

Regarding the benefit "Remain up-to-date", 37 (69.811%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 16 (30.189%) agreed that conference or workshop attendance makes librarians remain up to date.

Regarding the benefit "Acquire new ideas", 24 (45.28%) respondents strongly agreed and 29 (54.72%) agreed that conference or workshop attendance helps them acquire more skills.

Regarding the benefit "Network with other librarians", all 53 (100%) respondents strongly agreed that conference or workshop attendance helps them network with other librarians.

Regarding the benefit "Socialize with colleagues", 8 (15.10%) respondents strongly agreed, 12 (22.64%) agreed, 18 (33.96%) were undecided, and 15 (28.30%) disagreed that conference or workshop attendance helps them socialize with colleagues.

Regarding the benefit "Inspire research ideas", 44 (83.02%) respondents strongly agreed and 9 (16.98%) agreed that conference or workshop attendance inspires research ideas.

Regarding the benefit "Share research findings", all 53 (100%) respondents strongly agreed that conference or workshop attendance enable them to share research findings.

Regarding the benefit "Discuss emerging trends in the profession", 32 (60.38%) respondents strongly agreed and 21 (39.62%) agreed that conference or workshop attendance enables them to discuss emerging trends in the profession.

Regarding the benefit "Opportunity to interact with experts in the profession", 41 (77.35%) respondents strongly agreed, 10 (18.86%) agreed, and 2 (3.80%) were undecided on conference or workshop attendance as an opportunity to interact with experts in the profession.

Regarding the benefit "Develop publishing and presentation opportunities", 33 (62.3%) respondents strongly agreed and 20 (37.7%) agreed that a benefit of attending a conference or a workshop is opportunities for presentations and/or publishing.

Regarding the benefit "Capacity building", 49 (92.5%) respondents strongly agreed and 4 (7.5%) agreed that one benefit of attending a conference or a workshop is for capacity building.

Regarding the benefit "Professional rejuvenation", 34 (64.2 %) respondents strongly agreed, 16 (30.2%) agreed, and 3 (5.7%) were undecided that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for professional rejuvenation.

Regarding the benefit "Professional development", all 53 (100%) respondents strongly agreed that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for professional development.

Regarding the benefit "Continuing education", 22 (41.50%) respondents strongly agreed, 27 (51%) agreed, and 4 (7.5%) were undecided that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for continuing education.

Regarding the benefit "Collaboration", 47 (88.7 %) respondents strongly agreed and 6 (11.3%) agreed that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for collaboration.

Regarding the benefit "Opportunity to share experience", 25 (47.2%) respondents strongly agreed, 20 (37.7 %) agreed, 5 (9.44%) respondents were undecided, and 3 (5.7 %) respondents disagreed that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is opportunities to share experiences.

Regarding the benefit "Motivation", 9 (17.0%) respondents strongly agreed, 36 (67.9%) agreed, 2 (3.8%) were undecided, and 6 (11.3%) disagreed that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for motivation.

Regarding the benefit "Collection development", 18 (33.96 %) respondents strongly agreed, 21 (39.6%) agreed, 11 (20.75 %) were undecided, and 3 (5.7%) disagreed that a benefit of conference or workshop attendance is for collection development.

*Table 5*. Challenges to Conference/workshop attendance by Librarians

| Challenges to conference/workshop attendance by librarians | Strongly Agree (SA) | Agree (A) | Un decided (UD) | Disagree (DA) | Strongly Disagree (SDA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost is high | 32 (60.37%) | 18 (33.96%) | 3 (5.7%) | - | - |
| Lack of sponsorship | 13 (24.53%) | 30 (56.60%) | 2 (3.77%) | 8 (15.10%) | |
| Lack of interest | - | - | 9 (16.98%) | 11 (20.75%) | 33 (62.3%) |
| Lack of awareness | | | 9 (19.98%) | 11 (20.75%) | 33 (62.264%) |
| Inconveniences to attend due to workload in the office. | - | 3 (5.7%) | | 13 (24.5%) | 37 (69.8%) |

Table 5 shows that 32 (60.377%) respondents strongly agreed, 18 (33.96%) agreed, and 3 (5.66%) were undecided that the cost of attending is high.

In addition, 13 (24.5%) respondents strongly agreed, 30 (56.60%) agreed, 2 (3.77%) were undecided, and 8 (15.094%) strongly disagree that they lack sponsorship.

9 (16.98%) respondents were undecided, 11 (20.75%) disagreed, and 33 (62.264%) strongly disagree that lack of interest is a challenge to conference or workshop attendance.

3 (5.66%) respondents agreed, 13 (24.5%) disagreed, and 37 (69.81%) strongly disagreed that inconveniences to attend a conference or a workshop due to workload in the office is a challenge.

*Table 6.* Solutions to the challenges

| Solutions to the challenges | Strongly Agree (SA) | Agree (A) | Un decided (UD) | Disagree (DA) | Strongly Disagree (SDA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parent organization /Institution should always sponsor Librarians | 16 (30.19%) | 31 (58.5%) | 6 (11.32%) | - | - |
| Multinational companies should sponsor conferences for Librarians | 11 (20.75%) | 40 (75.47%) | 2 (3.8%) | - | - |
| Organizers of conferences/Workshop should publicize schedules in good time. | 26 (49.05%) | 25 (47.17%) | - | 2 (3.8%) | |
| Cost of registration for conferences/Workshop should be reduced | 50 (94.34%) | 3 (5.66%) | - | - | - |
| NLA and LRCN should work with conference/Workshop organizers to regulate the registration fee for the benefits of Librarians | 42 (79.25%) | 11 (20.75%) | - | - | - |

Table 6 shows that 16 (30.19%) respondents strongly agreed, 31 (58.5%) agreed, and 6 (11.32%) were undecided whether parent organization or institution should always sponsor librarians to attend conferences or workshops.

In addition, 11 (20.75%) respondents strongly agreed, 40 (75.47%) agreed, and 2 (3.8%) were undecided whether multinational companies should sponsor conferences for librarians.

26 (49.05%) respondents strongly agreed, 25 (47.17%) agreed, and 2 (3.8%) disagree whether organizers of conferences or workshops should publicize schedules in good time.

50 (94.34%) respondents strongly agreed and 3 (5.66%) agreed that cost of registration for conferences or workshop should be reduced.

42 (79.25%) respondents strongly agreed and 11 (20.75%) agreed that NLA and LRCN should work with conference or workshop organizers to regulate the registration fee for the benefits of librarians.

## VII. Conclusion

Conference or workshop attendance by librarians is a necessity, especially in this era of information technology application and use in libraries and information centers. The benefits of attending library conferences or workshops are enormous. Librarians acquire new skills to remain relevant. Conference or workshop attendance also positions librarians well for effective and efficient services to uses. Librarians must strive at all cost to attend conferences or workshops.

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