New trends for professional collaboration and impact on problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria

Yemisi O. Oladapo[1*], Solomon O. Oyetola[1], Adenike O. Gariba[1], Kudirat O. Salami[1], Bukola G. Adedoyin[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper identified new trends for professional collaboration and impact on problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria. The study generated peer support and collaboration among medical librarians and health science educators across Nigeria at a clinical orientation seminar held at the University of Osun (former LAUTECH College of Health). The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The study population consisted of 175 participants, of which 105 were selected as the sample size. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Findings showed that the participants strongly agreed that professional collaboration in health science complements roles and cooperatively works together, sharing responsibility for problem-solving and making decisions to formulate and carry out plans for medical care. Also, the findings revealed the three components of collaboration for effective medical librarian service delivery (work-related problems): sharing solutions to teaching-related problems; providing personal and emotional support, and; creatively solving problems. It was recommended that an ambitious agenda or universal problem-solving goals could be achieved through effective professional collaboration.

Key Words: Impact, Medical Librarians, Professional Collaboration, Problem-Solving Skills.

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[1]Olusegun Oke Library, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Oyo state, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: yooladapo@lautech.edu.ng

Introduction

Over the years, the role of librarians has evolved in response to emerging trends and technological advancements. As the scientific world undergoes a transformative revolution fuelled by the global competitiveness of information technology, librarianship practices have been profoundly influenced. This shift catalyses changes in how librarians engage with patrons, leading to reshaping their strategies and approaches. Amidst this transformation, health science educators emerge as stalwarts, playing an integral role in this collaborative dynamic. Equipped with pedagogical expertise and deep-rooted subject knowledge, they hold the key to preparing a competent and compassionate healthcare workforce. These educators stand poised to impart foundational knowledge and practical skills to future healthcare practitioners, thereby infusing the collaboration between medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria with heightened significance.

This partnership resonates as a linchpin for effective problem-solving and knowledge propagation, where two distinct professional domains converge with a shared vision of enhancing healthcare education and research through a cohesive partnership. The strategic involvement of key professional bodies further solidifies this dedication; The Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), and the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) converge, reinforcing a collective endeavour to foster a holistic and informed healthcare ecosystem.

Atkinson (2019) identified effective collaboration as a necessity among academic libraries because of its

benefits, such as creativity, avoiding duplication of effort, providing efficiency savings, streamlining work processes, and freeing up time for more value-added activities. Pinfield et al., (2017), also observe that despite the challenges associated with academic library collaboration, with trust, openness, commitment, resilience, and promises, academic libraries can realise considerable benefits through collaboration.

Dlamini et al., (2018), examined and assessed the level of collaboration between libraries and academics in the Department of Library and Information Studies for curriculum development in KwaZulu-Natal. The author reviewed related literature, which established the evidence for their findings. It was concluded that collaboration is relevant to library and information science educators to bridge the gap between Library and Information Science (LIS) academics and librarians to improve the relevance of the LIS curriculum.

Sacchanand (2012) and Sibiya (2017) also noted that collaboration is an effective activity to achieve a set goal. Similarly, Goulding and Walton (2013) investigated the skills and attributes required to lead successful collaboration in typical library services. Nicolaidis et al. (2011) recognised the importance of collaboration or partnership among librarians. These professional authors conclude that training, education, and practice would effectively develop the skills and attributes required to lead successful collaboration in library services. Therefore, this also applies to medical librarians who collaborate on problem-solving, especially in Nigeria. The skills and attributes required to increase collaboration for effective and efficient library service are imperative (Bell, 2013).

In their study, Chen et al., (2011), explored the collaboration between library and information science educators and practitioners, specifically faculty and librarians. The authors conducted a literature review on the importance of collaboration to enhance library and information science educational programs and provide effective library services to patrons. The report identified potential and experiential barriers to collaboration, which were found to be similar to those faced by

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). The authors emphasized the need to strengthen and expand collaboration to facilitate successful libraries, information programs, and services in the new educational environment.

Richit et al., (2021), examined the aspects of professional collaboration in a study conducted with mathematics teachers in the final year of basic education. Manuel (2012), revealed mutual encouragement, support, cooperation, and shared reflection. Therefore, this paper attempts to identify the need for professional collaboration as it affects problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Observations indicate a noticeable increase in the disconnect among health information specialists in Nigeria regarding collaborative problem-solving. This emerging gap underscores the urgency for innovative approaches to foster effective professional collaboration. Hence, traditional roles of medical libraries face potential jeopardy, as the resources and guidance provided by medical librarians and health science educators in the era of digital advancements can often go unnoticed, impeding the enhancement of professional collaboration.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What forms of professional collaboration are used by medical librarians and health science educators?
2. What is the attitude of medical librarians and health science educators towards professional collaboration for problem-solving in Nigeria?
3. what is the extent and level of professional collaboration skills in problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria?
4. What challenges are encountered by medical librarians and health science educators on professional collaboration for problem-solving in Nigeria?

Methods

The study used a descriptive survey research design. The design exploited a mostly quantitative approach. The study population consisted of 175 medical librarians and health science educators at a clinical orientation seminar held at the University of Osun (former LAUTECH College of Health), of whom 105 were randomly selected as samples. The study's instrument was a structured questionnaire self-developed by the researcher and validated by two experts in Library and Information Science. The questionnaire comprises two sections: Section A solicited personal information, while Section B was designed as four-scale Likert-type questions. The scale ranged from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), and Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD) to solicit questions on medical librarians and health science educators' professional collaboration for problem-solving.

Results

Table 1 shows the distributions of respondents according to demographic variables. The respondents were 35 medical librarians and 70 health science educators. The table shows that the majority of the respondents were male. It also shows that the respondents are of varying ages, and possess various academic qualifications and ranks, which are prerequisite for completing the questionnaire for this study.

Research Question 1: What forms of professional collaboration are used by medical librarians and health science educators?

Table 2 shows the forms of professional collaboration among the respondents. The findings of the study showed that the professional collaborations most cited are virtual collaboration (17.14%), networking collaboration (16.19%) and internal collaboration (14.28%). The least reported form of professional collaboration is team collaboration (6.6%).

It indicates that medical librarians and health science educators participate in different professional collaborations to facilitate effective problem-solving. The findings of the study showed

that medical librarians are involved in various forms of professional collaboration.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

	Variables	Frequency (n=105)	%
Career	Medical librarians	35	33%
	Health science educators	70	67%
	Total	*105*	*100%*
Gender	Female	45	43%
	Male	60	57%
	Total	105	100%
Age (in years)	25-34	17	16%
	35-44	33	32%
	45-54	37	35%
	55 and above	18	17%
	Total	*105*	*100%*
Academic Qualification	Post-Doctoral	4	4%
	Ph.D.	13	12%
	Master Degree	60	57%
	Bachelor Degree	28	27%
	Total	*105*	*100%*
Rank	Professor	4	4%
	Reader	3	3%
	Senior Lecturer	17	16%
	Lecturer I	26	25%
	Lecturer II	24	23%
	Assistant Lecturer	11	10%
	Graduate Lecturer	20	19%
	Total	*105*	*100%*

Table 2: Forms of Professional Collaboration

Items	Frequency (n= 105)	%
Internal collaboration	15	14.3
External collaboration	11	10.5
Cloud collaboration	10	9.5
Virtual collaboration	18	17.2
Team collaboration	7	6.6
Cross-departmental collaboration	14	13.3
Network collaboration	17	16.2
Community collaboration	13	12.4

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of medical librarians towards professional collaboration for problem-solving in Africa?

Table 3 shows respondents' attitudes towards professional collaboration for problem-solving in Africa. It is evident from the Table that most of the respondents (84%) claimed that professional collaboration strengthens their knowledge for problem-solving. About 83% also strongly agreed that it improves their professional skills needed for problem-solving. The Table also shows that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that professional collaboration has a positive impact on problem-solving. This is good for their professional development as they can collaborate to solve problems that can inhibit their development.

Table 3: Attitude of Respondents towards the Professional Collaboration for Problem-Solving

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Improves confidence	74 (70%)	23 (22%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)
Develops critical thinking skills	72 (68%)	26 (25%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Enhances personal development	68 (65%)	30 (28%)	6 (6%)	1 (1%)
Learn how to organise both human and material resources to library	65 (62%)	32 (30%)	6 (6%)	2 (2%)
Learn how management meeting are conducted	63 (60%)	37 (35%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)
Provide for succession planning	60 (57%)	42 (40%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Strengthens knowledge	88 (84%)	14 (13%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Enhances medical librarian professional skill	61 (58%)	27 (26%)	10 (9%)	7 (7%)
Inspires entrepreneurship	76 (72%)	26 (25%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Encourage social interaction	59 (56%)	41 (39%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Enhances creative & innovation	86 (82%)	13 (12%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Helps from each other sills	58 (55%)	40 (38%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Relieved of some duties	56 (53%)	38 (36%)	6 (6%)	5 (5%)
Build confidence of medical librarians	62 (59%)	35 (33%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)
Promote professional diversity	78 (74%)	23 (22%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
Equips for leadership skills	67 (64%)	30 (28%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)
Extends lifelong learning	60 (57%)	40 (38%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Encourage professional engagement	75 (71%)	27 (26%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Improves professional skills	87 (83%)	14 (13%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)

Research Question 3: To what extent is the level of professional collaboration skills in problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria?

Table 4 presents findings on the respondents' professional collaboration skills in problem-solving.

The results reveal that most respondents (82%) use online collaboration software, followed by some 76% that use collective impact initiative, and cross-departmental communication (75%). The least method used is strategic alliance (59%).

Table 4: Professional collaboration skills on problem-solving among the respondents

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Online collaboration software	86 (82%)	13 (12%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Cross-departmental communication	79 (75%)	21 (20%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)
Team building games	74 (70%)	27 (26%)	1 (1%)	3 (3%)
Strategic co-funding	65 (62%)	32 (30%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)
Celebration of effort	77 (73%)	22 (21%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Strategic alliance	62 (59%)	32 (30%)	6 (6%)	5 (5%)
Collective impact initiatives	80 (76%)	21 (20%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)

Research Question 4: What challenges are encountered by medical librarians and health science educators in professional collaboration for problem-solving in Nigeria?

Table 5 presents findings on the challenges facing the respondents in professional collaborations for problem-solving. The table revealed that lack of productivity (87%) is the most common challenge, followed by oversaturation of ideas (80%), and lack of diversity (76%), while lack of clear vision was the least experienced problem (54%).

Table 5: Challenges Encountered by Respondents in Professional Collaboration

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Lack of clear vision	57 (54%)	39 (37%)	5 (5%)	4 (4%)
Developing trust among team members	63 (60%)	35 (33%)	3 (3%)	4 (4%)
Lack of diversity	80 (76%)	22 (21%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Oversaturation of ideas	84 (80%)	15 (14%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Difficulty in achieving seamless communication	76 (72%)	23 (22%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)
Employee hesitation and lack of compliance	66 (63%)	34 (32%)	2 (2%)	3 (3%)
Lack of productivity	91 (87%)	12 (11%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Eliminating organizational silos	59 (56%)	35 (33%)	7 (7%)	4 (4%)
Negative employee mindset	64 (61%)	38 (36%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)

Discussion

The study's findings show that medical librarians and health science educators were involved in various forms of professional collaboration. They mostly preferred virtual, network, and internal collaboration. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the medical librarians and health science educators strongly agreed that professional collaboration strengthens their knowledge for problem-solving. This is closely related to Sacchanand's (2012) and Sibiya (2017) findings, which established professional collaboration as an effective activity to achieve a set goal.

Also, the study's findings revealed that most medical librarians and health science educators used online collaboration software, followed by collective impact initiatives. However, the findings showed that medical librarians and health science educators faced different problems, some of which were lack of productivity, oversaturation of ideas, and lack of diversity. This is in tandem with the findings of Pinfield et al. (2017).

Conclusion

This study delved into the emerging trends in professional collaboration and their impact on problem-solving among medical librarians and health science educators in Nigeria. The findings underscore a consensus among these professionals, with a majority expressing agreement and a positive outlook towards enhancing problem-solving through collaborative efforts. Notably, the study revealed that medical librarians and health science educators actively engage in diverse forms of professional collaboration to address challenges. Their experiences further highlighted the substantial benefits of navigating challenges, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to professional collaboration for effective problem-solving. This study sheds light on the pivotal role of collaboration and provides insights into leveraging challenges as opportunities to strengthen collaborative practices within this dynamic domain.

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