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# MANUSCRIPTS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLICATION IN THE INFORMATION PROFESSION IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERISTICS OF REJECTED AND ACCEPTED PAPERS

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A comparative analysis of the characteristics of rejected manuscripts submitted for publication to the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* and manuscripts accepted for publication over a five year period was carried out. The study reveals that 145 manuscripts were rejected as opposed to eighty papers accepted for publication. The findings reveal that there were no remarkable differences with regards to status and affiliations between the authors of rejected and accepted papers. While information technology, archives, user studies, academic libraries and bibliometrics constituted the topics of papers mostly rejected, papers accepted were mainly in the areas of archives, information service, information technology and rural information. Most of the papers were rejected because they contributed nothing new to knowledge (65.5%), used unreliable data (13.1%) and lacked focus (13.1%). Datedness of references was not used in rejecting papers because the editorial board policy is to update references of papers accepted for publication where necessary. The paper recommends the need for training institutions in Africa to strengthen the research and writing skills component of their curricula, as well as the regular scheduling of research and writing skills workshops by information organisations in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

EXTENDING THE FRONTIERS of knowledge is one of the hallmarks of an academic, thus academics all over the world strive to conduct research investigations into various disciplines with a view to making the world better. The results of these investigations are supposed to be disseminated worldwide. These could be in form of presentation of such findings at seminars and conferences or using

publication outlets such as journals, monographs, reports or books. Because of the importance of research in many academic institutions all over the world, the 'publish or perish' syndrome has become the norm hence most research findings are eventually published. Besides academics, professionals are also expected to conduct research, especially applied research, and the findings are disseminated in the same way.

Publishing research findings in academic journals involves a number of processes, most especially the peer reviewing process. A paper is eventually published after it has been found publishable; those that fail the test will be rejected.

In Africa, research is also taken seriously; however, a major drawback is the unavailability of a large number of relevant and current journals in many disciplines. Hence it is not uncommon for researchers in Africa to submit their research findings to journals published abroad. For a variety of reasons, many of these papers are rejected.

In the library and information science scene in Africa, there is a paucity of active journals, hence journals published in Europe and America are regularly patronised by African authors. Unfortunately a high proportion of papers submitted to journals published abroad are regularly rejected. In a study of papers rejected by the *Journal of Documentation* between 1981 and 1989, Cronin and McKenzie [1] reported that 101 papers were rejected, with Africa accounting for a fifth. It was reported that all the twenty-one papers that emanated from Africa were rejected – Nigeria (17), Zambia (3) and Uganda (1). In another study of papers submitted to the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, McDonald and Feather [2] reported that only 3% of the papers published between 1992 and 1993 came from Africa. Some of the probable reasons for this high rejection rate have been provided by some writers among whom are Marcos [3] who said African authors write almost exclusively from a local point of view. Nzotta [4] also found that most African authors cited hardly any recent publications. In a related study Aina [5] found that only 25% of the publications cited by African authors were published within five years prior to the research investigation. The majority of the papers cited were very dated.

From the foregoing, it is obvious why most manuscripts submitted to journals are rejected. One significant aspect of all the related studies in relation to rejected papers in Africa is that no empirical study has been carried out with respect to journals published in Africa.

The major objectives of this study are to find out the characteristics of rejected manuscripts submitted to the *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* (*AJLAIS*) and secondly to find out if there are remarkable differences between rejected papers and accepted papers with respect to status and affiliation of authors.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the stated objectives, *AJLAIS*, which is the main medium for disseminating research findings in library, archives and information science in Africa, was used for collecting the data for this study. The journal is one of only two refereed journals that are active in the region; the other journal is the *South*

*African Journal of Library and Information Science* which has its focus on South Africa.

*AJLAIS* is accessible to all potential authors in Anglophone Africa and the journal has been in existence for the past seven years, the frequency being twice a year. The data collected were based on manuscripts submitted to the journal between 1991 and 1995. The data included status and affiliated institutions of authors, the subjects of the rejected and accepted manuscripts, as well as the reasons for the rejection of papers as stated in assessors' reports.

Ideally all the journals published in Africa should have been used for this study but, as stated earlier, most of the journals published in Africa are moribund as only two of the journals in the profession are actually very active. In addition, the authors only have access to the manuscripts submitted to *AJLAIS*. Thus all the manuscripts rejected and accepted during the period were considered. The editorial board of the journal decide on the status of each manuscript after receiving reports from assessors. A manuscript is accepted for publication if there are positive assessments from at least two assessors; otherwise it is rejected and the reasons for rejection are communicated to the authors. The assessors are mainly senior practising professionals and top academics in Africa. The criteria for accepting a manuscript for publication are: contribution to knowledge;  appropriate methodology;  valid  data;  citation  of  relevant  literature;  and  good  writing  style. Contribution to knowledge is, however, the most important criterion.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Two hundred and thirty six manuscripts were received during the period considered and 145 or 61.44 % were rejected and eighty were accepted for publication. The remaining eleven manuscripts were sent to their authors for revision but these were never carried out. Of the 145 rejected papers, ninety-eight or 61.6% were single authored while for accepted papers, sixty-six or 82.5% were contributed by single authors. Table 1 shows the distribution of the rejected and accepted papers according to the status of authors. Three categories of authors were delineated: top information professionals (university librarians and deputies, professors and associate professors and directors and deputy directors of libraries, archives and information  centres);  middle  information  professionals  (principal  librarians,

Table 1. *Status of authors*

| Status | REJECTED | | ACCEPTED | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *Number* | *Percentage* | *Number* | *Percentage* |
| Top | 24 | 16.6 | 20 | 25.0 |
| Middle | 106 | 73.1 | 53 | 66.3 |
| Junior | 13 | 9.0 | 3 | 3.8 |
| Other | 2 | 1.4 | 4 | 5.0 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 | 80 | 100.0 |

senior librarians, lecturers and senior lecturers); junior information professionals (librarians and assistant lecturers etc.).

Twenty-four or (16.6%) of the authors of the rejected papers were in the top category while 73.1% came from the middle information professionals. On the other hand, 25% of the accepted papers came from the top category while 66.3% were in the middle echelon. Thus there is no remarkable difference with regards to the status of authors of rejected and accepted papers. Similarly Table 2, which shows the affiliations of the authors, presents the same scenario, as most of the authors of accepted and rejected papers came from university libraries and library schools. For rejected papers, they constituted 84.8%, while 86.25% of the accepted papers were from university and library schools. Table 3 shows that the rejected papers covered a variety of areas. The most prominent areas are listed in the table. Papers on information technology (IT) were the largest category of rejected papers, but IT constitutes a significant proportion of papers accepted. However papers on archives and information services were the largest category of papers accepted for publication (see Table 4). Papers on academic libraries were rejected mainly because the majority of the authors were reporting on academic status for librarians in the universities. The topic has been over exposed and most of the papers did not present anything new.

Table 5 shows the major reasons for rejecting papers. Most of the papers were rejected because they contributed nothing new to knowledge (65.5%). These were papers that were either extracted from textbooks or no new idea had been brought up in the paper. A high proportion of the papers were also rejected because of unreliable data. This is because the data used were either collected from a biased sample or there was evidence of incongruence of figures. In some cases, no background data of the respondents were given. Some of the rejected papers had no focus – these were studies which tend to touch on almost every aspect of the profession without necessarily providing a focus. Papers that were described as too narrow are related to where authors have written on their

Table 2. *Affiliations of authors*

| Organisation | REJECTED | | | ACCEPTED | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *No.* | *%* | *Cum.%* | *No.* | *%* | *Cum.%* |
| Univ. libraries | 81 | 55.9 | 55.9 | 37 | 46.25 | 46.25 |
| Library schools | 42 | 28.9 | 84.8 | 32 | 40 | 86.25 |
| Public libraries | 9 | 6.2 | 91 | 2 | 2.5 | 88.75 |
| Special libraries | 4 | 2.8 | 93.8 | 4 | 5 | 93.75 |
| Polytech libraries | 3 | 2.1 | 95.9 | 1 | 1.25 | 95 |
| College of educ. libraries | 1 | 0.7 | 96.6 | 0 | 0 | 95 |
| Archives | 1 | 0.7 | 97.3 | 0 | 0 | 95 |
| Other | 4 | 2.8 | 100.1 | 4 | 5 | 100 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 80 | 100 | 100 |

Table 3. *Subjects of rejected papers*

| Subject | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Information technology | 18 | 12.4 |
| Academic libraries | 12 | 8.3 |
| Archives and records | 10 | 6.9 |
| User needs | 8 | 5.5 |
| Bibliometrics | 7 | 4.8 |
| Agric. information | 7 | 4.8 |
| Resource sharing/ information networks | 7 | 4.8 |
| Library management | 7 | 4.8 |
| General | 6 | 4.1 |
| Publishing | 5 | 3.5 |
| Rural information | 5 | 3.5 |
| Other | 53 | 36.5 |
| Total | 145 | 100 |

Table 4. *Subjects of accepted papers*

| Subject | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Archives | 10 | 12.50 |
| Information services | 8 | 10.00 |
| Information technology | 7 | 8.75 |
| Rural information | 6 | 7.50 |
| Education and training | 4 | 5.00 |
| Library management | 4 | 5.00 |
| Handicapped | 4 | 5.00 |
| Other | 37 | 46.25 |
| Total | 80 | 100 |

organisations and the results of such findings have no immediate or long term benefits to other organisations.

Datedness of references was not used as a factor in rejecting a manuscript because of the problems generally associated with access to recent literature in Africa; this is however when a paper has merit. *Library Literature* and *Library and Information Science Abstracts* (CD-ROM) version databases would be searched and authors of papers that fall under this category are normally provided with up-to-date references or in some cases the full documents. They are expected to incorporate such references into the paper and then resubmit to the editor.

Table 5. *Reasons for rejecting papers*

| Reason | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Nothing new | 95 | 65.5 |
| Unreliable data | 19 | 13.1 |
| No focus | 19 | 13.1 |
| Narrow focus | 8 | 5.5 |
| Other | 4 | 2.8 |
| Total | 145 | 100 |

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the large number of papers submitted in five years, it is apparent that the information professionals in Africa are well aware of the importance of research. The fact that rejection and acceptance of manuscripts among information professionals cuts across the board irrespective of status and affiliation means that a lot more needs to be done to assist information professionals in Africa in reducing the rate of rejection. The high rate of rejection can probably be attributed to the lack of adequate research and writing skills; thus there is a need for training institutions in Africa to strengthen the research component of their curricula. In addition, professional associations should provide research and writing skills workshops for their members. It is hoped that international organisations will provide financial assistance to professional organisations in the information profession to enable them to organise workshops and seminars in this area. Information organisations should also actively support the research interests of their professionals by subscribing to 'core' journals in the information profession. Employers of information professionals will be expected to compensate authors who are actively involved in research.

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