

BOOK REVIEW 2

RESEARCH IN INFORMATION SCIENCES: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Editor: Aina L.O.

Publisher: Stirling Horden Publishers, Ibadan Nigeria.
Year of Publication: 2002

Reviewer: A. G. Nkhoma-Wamunza
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

This book is a collection of articles written by different authors. The book is divided into nine chapters including the introduction. The book addresses the research process, proposal writing, methodologies, procedures, principles, instrumentation, and data collection techniques, statistical analyses, sources of information, the importance of archival sources and IT application in libraries.

Purpose

This book provides basic information and knowledge about the research process, methods, procedures and principles and techniques.

Audience:

This book is aimed at students, lecturers in Library and Information Science education (LIS) and practicing professional librarians.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized in nine chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Provides an overview of the role of research, the research process and planning, organization, literature review, data analysis, report writing, presentation and dissemination as well as tips on referencing sources. The author argues that any research undertaking must have a purpose and must focus on the identified problem, and that the biggest challenge lies in defining the problem. A review of the literature is a key component of the research process and the purpose is to determine what has been done, what remains to be done, methods, objectives, concepts and research questions. Tools used in reviewing the literature included library

catalogues, indexes, bibliographies, theses and dissertations, the Internet etcetera are also discussed. The differences between quantitative, qualitative, basic/pure and applied research is explained.

Chapter 2: Research Methodologies in Information Science

In this Chapter, Aina and Jiferuke discuss a wide variety of research methods, including surveys, historical, experimental research, case studies, Delphi studies, bibliometrics, and citation analysis sampling methods and techniques and their application in information science research. The chapter ends with set of review questions designed to enhance understanding of those interested in undertaking research.

Chapter Three: Data Collection Instruments in Information Science

In this chapter Onyango focuses on instruments namely, questionnaire, Interviews, observations guides and documentary evidence, design and questionnaire administration and their advantages and disadvantages. The chapter concludes with practical exercises.

Chapter Four: Information resources in Library and Information Science research

In this chapter, Serema and Mooko focus on tools and sources of information used in library and information science research. These include archival sources, catalogues, indexes and abstracts, bibliographies, books, thesis and dissertations, government and research reports, manuscripts, newspapers, magazines, handbooks, year books including current awareness services, Internet search engines, as well as journals, grey literature government publications. According to the authors, these are also important sources when reviewing related literature.

Chapter Five: Using Archival Sources for Research in Africa

In this chapter, Ajiferuke introduces the role of African archival resources, their nature, their role and importance in research, factors constraining their access and effective use. Ajirefuke further notes that effective use of these resources is constrained by existing gaps, poor record keeping, organizational, management and preservation problems as well as the lack of designated archival institutions in some African countries. The author stresses that archival resources inform and reflect the collective memories of institutions, organizations including government and their component parts, their history, past policies, successes and failures. As such, not only are these resources key sources of demographic information and trends, they also play a major role in planning, decision making, protection of human and individual rights, privileges, entitlements and responsibilities as well as issues pertaining to international boundaries.

The author concludes that despite their importance, archival sources are not effectively utilized by researchers because their effective use requires knowledge on their nature, history of creating institutions, familiarity with finding aids, retrieval tools, guides, inventories and simple hand lists as well as an understanding of how they are organization and arranged. According to the author, on the one hand, the principal of provenance requires that archival records be kept separate from other organizations records even if they are related and on the other hand, the principal of original order demands that archival records be retained in their original order as they were in the custody of those who created them.

Major problems associated with the use of African archival records mentioned include; the lack of comprehensive surveys, retrieval tools, national registers and guides that describe and facilitate location of these records, poor storage and lack of preservation restoration and conservation programmes and strategies, lack of laboratory facilities and equipment, staffing shortages, backlogs, outdated laws, restricted access and indefinite closures as well as lack of internet facilities. Furthermore, the author provides tips on how to cite archival sources. The chapter concludes that existing rules, regulations, procedures and copyright laws governing archival records should be reviewed. The chapter concludes with review questions and also includes references and a bibliography.

Chapter six: Use of Statistics in Library and Information Science research

In this chapter, Ajiferuke takes the would be researchers through data analysis methods, measurements and decisions that influence choices and interpretation. Descriptive statistics, frequency tables and charts and inferential statistics are also considered powerful communication tools in summarizing, presenting data and generalizing research findings. The author notes that most researchers in library and information science tend to shy away from statistics. This is mainly attributed to lack of statistical knowledge. Finally the author stresses that statistical knowledge is crucial in facilitating in-depth data analysis and interpretation of research results.

Chapter Seven: Computer application in library and information science research

This chapter introduces students to a wide range of computer applications in qualitative, quantitative and ethnographic studies including data analysis, statistical software applications, presentation software applications for example, power point and Harvard Graphics. Electronic resources, online databases, CD-ROMS, electronic journals, online Public Access Catalogues, Internet research facilities and search engines, list servs, subject directories, library gateways and their role in the research

process are discussed. Boolean logic as a search technique and evaluation of internet resources are also addressed.

Chapter 8: General Issues In research

This chapter discusses report writing, writing tips, editing, manuscript preparation for publication, web-publishing and presentation of research results. Problems patterning to plagiarism, infringement of copyright laws, double publishing and ethical issues and the publishing industry are also discussed. The author also further notes that not only is double publishing unethical it is also "a common evil" in library and information science.

Chapter 9: Writing a research Proposal in Information Science

In this chapter Thapista, focuses on the art of proposal writing and states that any research proposal must have an introduction and background to the problem, problem statement, objectives, justification, significance, definitions, delimitation and limitations, a review of the literature, research methodology, study area, sample and sampling techniques, expected output, time frame and a budget. The author stresses that, the research problem must be clearly stated and basically revolves around the what, the why and the how of the research process. Finally, the author recommends that proposal reviews and evaluation by peers is crucial and is designed to help the researcher to articulate key issues and to get feedback as to whether the research project is viable and if not how it can be improved.

Unique features of the book

While the research process in Information Science as outlined in this book is not different from what happens in other disciplines, and while this book does not add new knowledge to what we already know, nonetheless, this book is unique in the sense that it is written by African scholars and provides useful insights into sources of information, search tools and techniques, the role of archival resources and statistics in the research process, as well as tips on citing reference sources. The book also includes review questions, practical exercises and references at the end of each chapter which students can refer to in sharpening their research skills and knowledge.

I found **Chapter Five**-Using *archival sources* particularly useful in the sense that it provides useful information and insights into African archival sources, their importance, the constraints and challenges they face. Similarly, **Chapter Four**- *Information resources in Library and Information Science research* is very useful in that it exposes researchers, students, lecturers and librarians to different sources of information which are crucial when reviewing related literature. **Chapter Six** - *Use of Statistics in Library and Information Science research* is an eye opener

and discusses the importance of statistical knowledge to enhance data analysis, interpretation and presentation of research results.

This book is written in easy and simple to follow language. In this respect it has succeeded in enhancing students knowledge and understanding on what constitutes the research process, skills needed and in creating awareness on the constraining research environment in the African context.

This book is highly recommended for students and researchers who are about to embark on their first research projects.