

# Authorship and Co-Authorship: Some Basic Facts Librarians Should Know

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## **Abstract.**

**Purpose.** *The aim of this paper is to highlight salient points about authorship and co authorship which simple observation in the researcher's place of work and other related organizations around her showed that, they are being abused. The work went into detail to explain the concept of authorship and co authorship. It also offers reasons why people co author, the gains inherent in co authoring as well as the pitfalls of abusing co authorship.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach.** *The paper is based mostly on available literature in the field and on observations in the researchers workplace.*

**Practical Implications.** *The prestige of authorship is endangered in any environment that encourages irresponsible authorship. It will even put the intellectual capacity of the practitioners of that profession into question and if care is not taken, make them a laughable stock among other academics.*

**Originality/Value.** *The paper is a warning note to Librarians to avoid stifling their profession.*

**Keywords.** *Authorship, Co authorship, Librarians.*

## **Introduction**

There are various ways of communicating research information but academic publication is the most important. It is also the primary means through which academic promotion is determined. Authorship observed Vuckovic-Dekic (2003) is often the sole basis for academic advancement and because of that; the authorship issue is of great importance to all academic. Success in publishing connects closely with universities decisions on tenure and promotion; and with opportunities for merit based pay increases and alternative employment (Routledge and Karim, 2008). In the days of Einstein, Newton, Dewey etc opined Osborn and Holland (2009) authorship was simpler to trace. In those days, authorship was traceable to an individual. Today, as academics has grown more complex, joint or multiple authorship has come in to play and what constitutes authorship, most times has become bastardized.

Among Librarians in Nigeria, various forms of co authorship exist. Majority of them irrelevant, leaving the impressions to on-lookers that Librarians in Nigeria seem not to understand the term authorship. This work is an attempt to define what authorship or co authorship ought to

be based on literature from other academic fields. In doing this, the work tried to explain the following in clear terms.

1. Authorship /Co authorship
2. Types of authorship
3. Why co author
4. Ways of establishing authorship order

## **What is Authorship/Co Authorship?**

Authorship is the prestige bestowed on the originator (s) of a research publication. Laine (1983) defined authorship as a meal ticket. Berk (1989) called it the currency of research publication as all academic appointments, advancements, tenure and associated economic rewards hinge on it. Authorship in science opined Laine (1983) has a responsibility. Authors in science he further stated are those who identify themselves as the persons who are making public statements on paper for the scientific community and are taking responsibilities for those statements. Vuckovic-Dekic (2003) defined an author as the originator of both information and written work. It implies credit for creative work as well as accountability and responsibility. In single authored works Vuckovic-Dekic (2003) further stated the author does not share responsibility, both credit and

criticism are addressed to him only.

When a publication emanates from more than one person, the concept of co authorship arises. The term co authorship refers to any author of a publication other than the one listed first. A search through literature has shown that there has not been an accepted standard among researchers in sharing responsibility in co authored works. In some papers responsibility may be divided clearly .For instance authorship for individual sections is indicated within the article at the end of each section. In some other publications, the case may not be the same. But unless a note on the title page or elsewhere in a paper defines the specific responsibility of co authors for a specified section, readers must conclude that all co authors are taking responsibility for all the research work (Laine, 1983). It is expected that co authors should be aware of every development as the research progresses. A person asked to accept co authorship after the research or clinical study is underway, faces greater risks and should ask questions about who the other co authors are and their claims to co authorship ( Ducor, 2000). If the paper is an empirical study, the person should not hesitate to ask about the data, raw as well as digested to be reported. The person should also ask about the evidence in which the conclusion is based, who did the literature search and should be truthful to him/herself on the extent he/she can defend the paper if called upon to do so. Laine (1983) further admonished that anyone invited to accept co authorship after the study on which the papers ‘ conclusions are based, have been concluded, clearly risks being publicly linked with publication that may not enhance his/her reputation. Osborn & Holland (2009) suggested that individuals who do not have intellectual ownership of the publication or a substantial part of it should be made candidates for acknowledgement not authorship. They further stated that authorship should be limited to those who have substantially contributed to the work and who have a shared responsibility for the results. Substantial contribution according to Osborn & Holland(2009) include one or a combination of the following:

- a. Conception or design
- b. Data collection and processing
- c. Analysis and interpretation of data
- d. Writing substantial sections of the paper.

Ducor (2000) listed the following as categories that are not considered as “Substantial

contribution” and therefore do not merit inclusion in the authorship list.

- a. Reviewing a manuscript
- b. Editing a manuscript
- c. Doing the clerical or manual labor of gathering data, basic hardware/instrumentation maintenance and management.
- d. Funding a research.

#### **Types of Co Authorship.**

There are basically two types of co authorship. They are the Responsible an Irresponsible co authorship.

**Responsible Co authorship.** This refers to co authorship that is earned from contributing substantially to a publication. Several types of responsible co authorship patterns exist. They include:

1. *International co authorship.* This refers to a situation where authors from different countries collaborate to produce a scholarly publication. This type of collaboration increases citation rate of articles and is more beneficial to scholars from small universities. Internationally co authored papers are published in journals with different impact factors from those that publish domestic papers.
2. *Domestic multi-institutional collaboration.* This is a situation where scholars from different institutions but within the same country collaborate to produce a scholarly publication. This too has been shown to increase citation rates of articles (Berk, 1989)
3. *Inter-departmental collaboration.* Collaboration between departments within the same institution . Leimu and Koricheva (2005) observed that this type of collaboration does not enhance the citation rate of journals.
4. *Departmental co authorship.* This refers to co authorship among people within the same department. This has been proved to actually reduce the visibility and impact of research publication(Leimu and Koricheva , 2005)

**Irresponsible Co authorship.** This refers to a situation where authorship is extended to a person that has no business receiving it. It is therefore an unearned listing as an author. Vuckovic-Dekic (2003) identified the following

as forms of irresponsible co authorship in existence.

1. *Honorary* (Gratuitous, gift) authorship. This is the assigning of authorship to persons because of their authority or prestige or as courtesy. The reasons for including an undeserved coauthor are pressure to publish, friendship, sense of obligation, fear of offending someone etc. Such an unethical behavior is motivated primarily by academic promotion policies, which favour publication quantity instead of quality
2. *Ghost authorship*. In this type of co authorship the name of the person that actually owns the academic work is excluded from the co authorship list and therefore devoid of authorship. In most situations like this, the real owner of the intellectual work may be a hired hand by somebody who does not know anything in that field.

### **Harmful Effects of Irresponsible Co authorship.**

Berk (1989) identified the following as some of the harmful effects of irresponsible co authorship. They are:

1. It debases the value of authorship.
2. It dilutes the satisfaction that comes from being responsible for a contribution to the literature.
3. It vitiates the dignity of authorship and raises concern for intellectual honesty.
4. It is fraud, which like a stain can extend to other transgressions such as falsification of results.
5. It makes co authorship vulnerable to charges of fraud.

### **Why Co Author?**

Academics co author for several reasons. Some of them are as follows:

1. *Funds*: Funding requirement especially in large laboratory settings may induce collaboration in science based disciplines. Moreover it gives room for cost sharing (Routledge and Karim, 2005).
2. *Encourages team work*: In the social sciences, an increase in large scale data collection efforts and training differences among disciplines suggest a team production mode.

3. *Expertise*: It provides a large pool of available ideas, methods and resources for use in a single publication.
4. *Career enhancement*: Co authorship enhances career progress as the degree of collaboration is also taking into account when making funding, hiring and promotion decisions.
5. *Non-pecuniary purely consumption benefits*: This refers to the pleasure obtained from cooperation and suggest that higher levels of prestige among colleagues may also be a reason for collaboration (Oster, 2002).
6. *Time*: On individual collaborators, it saves time but collectively, it provides more available man hours to produce long articles (Routledge and Karim, 2005).
7. *Article production*: Co authorship increases the rate of article production through the division of labour made necessary by increased complexity in the subject matter.
8. *Acceptance of publication*: It also increases the probability of getting papers accepted for publication (Maske, Durden and Gaynor, (2003).
9. *Visibility*: It increases the visibility and citation rate of publications.
10. *More accuracy*: Co authorship yields more accurate result, as the final publication result from interactions among professionals.
11. It helps in professional development of all the parties involve.

### **Ways of Establishing Authorship Order.**

Co authorship order refers to ways of listing names in a publication. It is always good to take decisions (at least tentative decisions) about authorship order before a study is started. It is expected that co authors should be aware of every development as the research progresses. The following are ways of establishing a co authorship order.

1. *Status*: In establishing authorship by status, the co author with the highest status is listed first in the authorship order. Chang, Fung and Leung (2008) observed that articles whose first author emerged from highly ranked institutions indicates on average, a better quality article.
2. *Contribution*: In authorship order through contribution, the co author who contributed most to the work is listed first.

Osborn and Holland (2005) suggest that authorship order is best determined solely by magnitude of contribution to the project rather than by status or power within the research group.

3. **Alphabetical Listing:** This refers to a situation where the names of the co authors are listed alphabetically. Chang, Fung and Leung (2008) warned that alphabetical listing of names mutes signals to outsiders of the relative contribution of co authors. That is, some co authors ‘win’ while some other co authors ‘do not lose’ in terms of getting shares of their credit from the published work because outsiders cannot clearly distinguish their relative contributions. Joseph (2005) opined that high quality articles tend to list authors names alphabetically, because the high publishing hurdles makes it less likely that any single co author has contributed substantially more or less than other authors.

In Librarianship especially in Nigeria, there seems to be no guidelines in establishing authorship. Simple observation shows that in situations where members of the authorship team are of different status and power, the person with more status and power takes the first authorship whether he has contributed significantly to the work or not.

Furthermore the ‘‘PUT MY NAME’’ syndrome is another debase of authorship value. Put my name syndrome refers to a situation where a person that contributed absolutely nothing to a publication is asking the author(s) of a publication to enlist him/her as a co author. In most cases the ‘‘put my name’’ syndrome involves two authors that have worked separately on two different articles. Both authors might agree to include each other’s name in their publications, so that instead of one, both of them will have two publications carrying their names. Vuckovic-Dekic classified all manners of undeserved authorship in the central area of dishonesty.

Librarians must fight all forms of underserved authorship with vigour, otherwise a situation may arise one day in which one might be called to defend the views he appended his signature on, and of which he knows nothing about. Moreover, one might even append his signature on a publication in which the findings are based on falsehood like in the Darsee affair.

Though academic publications carries a lot of benefits, the consequences of being caught in a web of underserved authorship carry far more losses than the benefits that might accrue from it.

### **Recommendations.**

To help check the intrusion of undeserved authorship into Nigerian Librarianship, the author will like to recommend as follows:

1. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should integrate authorship policy into membership manual and make sure that new and existing staff are aware of them.
2. NLA should endeavor to be discussing authorship issues at least in their annual general meetings.
3. NLA should examine other professional bodies authorship guidelines and if possible, borrow a leaf from them.
4. All Librarians intending to co author a publication should endeavor to discuss authorship expectations before the commencement of the paper.
5. NLA should create a forum where marginalized co authors should report their cases without fear of victimization.

### **Conclusion**

Authorship is the prestige of all academic professions of which librarianship is one. It is the identification card through which academics are counted and recognized. As such it is nothing to be toyed with. It should be guided jealously to protect the prestige that emanates from it. Librarianship is a new profession in Nigeria, compared to other professions like Medicine and Law. The authenticity of the few publications that have accumulated on it should not be put into doubt. To allow otherwise, would mean jeopardizing the growth of the profession as well as that of its practitioners.

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