

**PARTNERSHIP IN LIS EDUCATION AND PRACTICE FOR GRADUATE  
EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

Over the years libraries have been working in partnership with private and public institutions towards achieving growth and sustainable development as well as improving services offered to their patrons. This paper therefore, provides some insights on library and information science education and practice in Nigeria. Attempts were made to look at the concept of partnership and its benefits for both library and information science educators and practicing professionals. This paper identifies the power of partnership in enhancing employment and employability of library and information science graduates and practicing professionals. Through partnership, the required knowledge and skills can be acquired for librarians and information professionals to enhance their employment and employability. Some examples and specific benefits of partnership in libraries were examined as useful guide for other stakeholders to adapt. The recommendations from this paper include engagement in partnership with relevant professional organizations, organizing short courses to address skills gap in library and information science students and practicing librarians, and to encourage librarians to participate actively in relevant programmes such as training and certification by CISCO Academy.

**KEYWORDS:** LIS Education and Practice, Partnership in Libraries, LIS Professionals, LIS Graduates.

**Introduction**

Over the years, libraries have been working in partnership with private and public institutions towards achieving growth and sustainable development as well as improving services offered to their patrons. It was based on experience and personal observations that in this paper, partnership will be discussed as relevant and necessary towards enhancing library and information science (LIS) education and practice in Nigeria. In the past, partnership from library perspective was largely aimed at improving services to patrons as well as user engagements (Massis, 2013). However, because of knowledge diffusion and fusion, the field of LIS has become more interrelated with other disciplines, most especially computer science and information technology. Therefore, arrangements in forms of partnerships are indispensable

because it could result into synergy that will bring greater success in terms of enhancing employment and employability of LIS graduates in Nigeria.

In fact, it is a common knowledge that LIS education and practice in Nigeria is facing numerous challenges. These challenges include dearth of qualified personnel, dilapidated or lack of infrastructure, poor funding by both Federal and State governments. Other challenges as asserted by Abubakar (2021) include lack of proper development, implementation and review of LIS curriculum, issue of digital literacy among personnel, and lack of synergy or effective participation among LIS education stakeholders. So going by the current trends of hard and soft skills as requirements of university graduates globally, it can be asserted that the LIS curriculum has not met the needs of both actual and potential employers in Nigeria. This means that the chances of employability of LIS professionals in Nigeria will continue to decrease despite the proliferation of library schools in the country. It is not in doubt that there are inadequacies of required skills for LIS graduates in Nigeria. However, Aina (2014) has over the years, noted these inadequacies and associated it with lack of depth and practical provisions in the training programmes. Aina further emphasized that employers look at librarians as information professionals. As such the librarians should be trained to meet the expectations of modern day jobs as demanded by the employers. This paper therefore, provides some insights that library schools and practicing librarians could consider as part of strategies for partnerships with other organizations or departments to enhance employment and employability of young graduates of LIS as well the practicing librarians in Nigeria.

In view of the foregoing, it is of paramount importance to examine the emerging trends in LIS education, and also explores the present status and challenges bedeviling employment and

employability of librarians with particular reference to Nigeria. The paper therefore, employs documents review method for data collection from secondary sources of information such as textbooks, journals, and online resources. Furthermore, some examples of partnership from other libraries and author's personal observations will be brought to bear in trying to make contents analysis and draw conclusion on the topic discussed. The paper will be useful to LIS educators and professionals in Nigeria as well as in other developing countries.

### **Highlights on LIS Education and Practice in the Digital Era**

Library and information science (LIS) is a discipline of different dimension in its theory and practice. The dimensional nature of LIS was because it deals with information and knowledge across all other disciplines. Therefore, the job requirements of LIS graduates has kept on changing in line with changing needs of different disciplines being served by the profession. In other words, over the years, libraries, information centres, and related organizations have continued to grow tremendously worldwide. This tremendous growth has equally increased the need for more LIS professionals to occupy different job positions. The development has also called for training of more LIS graduates by library schools. In Nigeria, the training for LIS education is offered at various tertiary educational institutions that include Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education. However, due to rapid advances in technology, the graduates of library and information science are no longer considered as custodians of books in the libraries, or professional workers in documentation, archives and record management, and related jobs like publishing and book trade. In other words, the training needs for LIS education has kept on changing according to changing needs in the society.

In view of the above, LIS education and professionals require both generic skills and discipline-specific knowledge in order to become adequately trained for employability and enhanced employment. According to Nonthacumjane (2011) generic skills refer to information literacy skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork, work ethics and social responsibility, problem solving ability and leadership skills. However, discipline-specific knowledge includes competencies in the use of metadata, database development and management system, handling user needs, archiving and preservation of digital materials, collection development and content management. Therefore, in order to work successfully in any type of library or related organization, the present generation of LIS professionals should have the competencies in terms of knowledge and skills required by employers. Those already on the jobs should also regard it as imperative to acquire skills and competencies that will enable them to adapt in library digital work environment as well as jobs in related organizations or institutions.

In this digital era; whereby all institutions and organizations have embraced the applications of ICTs in all aspects of their daily routines, then the jobs of LIS professionals are increasingly becoming more challenging. In this digital era; whereby all institutions and organizations have embraced the applications of ICTs in all aspects of their daily routines, then the jobs of LIS professionals are increasingly becoming more challenging as the whole world has become digital, then the present and future generations of LIS professionals require constant training on digital skills and reskilling for performing their jobs effectively, and to also be acceptable to the community they serves as well as to the larger society. The implication is that library schools and practicing librarians and information professionals should strive to acquire the necessary skills and competencies that will enhance their employment and employability in

line with requirement of the digital era. Employability skills have become indispensable in the digital era because of global competitiveness in jobs and much emphasis placed on improved performance with less errors in carrying out tasks.

In Africa, LIS education started in the 20th century at South Africa with establishment of first library school in 1938, while Nigeria established its first library school in 1960, located at the then University College Ibadan; which is presently the University of Ibadan. However, Abubakar, Gado and Kurabau (2022) noted that serious constraints still exist in the utilization of emerging technologies in library operations and service delivery, including teaching and learning activities in library schools. Thus, information resources acquisitions, management, and dissemination as well as teaching and learning are mostly done in traditional ways in Nigeria. Similarly, Abubakar (2021) stress that despite the global trends for digital transformation of all sectors of human endeavour, LIS education in Nigeria is yet to overcome challenges associated with curriculum, infrastructure, funding, and adequate qualified manpower. This implies that, the LIS professionals in Nigeria are yet to acquire the desired training to prepare them to meet the expectations of the society.

In fact, in the digital era, employment and employability of LIS professionals is being disrupted by the Fourth Industrial Revolution worldwide. This means any LIS graduate or professional who cannot access and manipulate the digital technologies will face serious challenges of unemployment, job losses, underemployment, low performance in working place or lack of gainful employment, and so on. In other words, the transformation brought by the 4TH Industrial Revolution will result into economic parity or disparity depending on how LIS professionals fit into the new job requirements. With the emergence of the 4TH Industrial

Revolution, Ajani, Adeyinka, Dunmade and Adeniran (2022) examine the prospects and future of information professionals in Nigeria. Thus, job market for LIS professionals will increasingly become heavily dependent on Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotic technologies, blockchain and soft skills. However, their study noted that the readiness of future LIS professionals in Nigeria is partial because of inhibiting factors that include: lack of synergy between library schools and employers; inadequate fund for library schools; shortage of qualified personnel; and negative attitude shown by students towards acquiring new skills. This means training for LIS professionals should involve relevant organizations of departments from within and beyond the parent institution environment.

Furthermore, a study by Okeji and Mayowa-Adebara (2021) reveals that library schools in Nigeria offer “digital libraries” course as part of the core courses in their curriculum. However, the students have limited access to computer laboratories to enhance digital skills. As a quick response in addressing this gap in training LIS professionals, partnership with relevant stakeholders or interrelated departments within an educational institution can play a very significant role. Hence, specific examples of these roles by possible partnering departments or organizations will be discussed in this paper.

### **Current Requirements for Employment and Employability of LIS Graduates in Nigeria**

Despite the availability and increasing access to information resources which is largely due to advances in information and communication technologies, libraries still remain relevant to the society. However, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has greatly impacted on LIS professionals to the extent that digital skills have become dominant in the core knowledge of their training and services offered to the society. But, the advantage is that, this development has resulted into new

job opportunities for LIS graduates. Examples of the new jobs are digital scholarships including online publishing, data management and data science, database administrator and web contents manager. Sibiya and Ngulube (2023) conducted a study that involved five head of libraries in South Africa, who were found to have embraced digital scholarship initiatives. The findings of their study reveal the new expectations of employers and job requirements of LIS professionals to include the following:

- qualifications for LIS graduate to include content on digital scholarship,
- possess knowledge, skills, and competencies on digital scholarship-related activities,
- LIS graduates to have ability to navigate digital scholarship activities at a basic level, and
- to be familiar with research data management and the ecosystem of digital publications.

In addition, the above study revealed that some difficulties that LIS employers do experience when hiring a LIS graduate include lack of background knowledge of science skills. This makes it often difficult for an LIS professional to easily become familiar with scientific terms and procedures of research that will enable him give necessary support to the researchers in the fields of Sciences, Engineering and Technology. Therefore, these researchers recommended that LIS schools should organize short courses on digital scholarship to cater for their students and the practicing librarians. Hence, it is interesting to note that above recommendations are central to the discussion in this paper.

In the past there were lots of misconceptions that availability and access to electronic information resources via the internet will gradually diminish libraries. This implied that consequently there will be job losses among LIS professionals. However, Malik and Ameen (2021) carried out a study on current and future job opportunities for librarians in Pakistan. The findings of the study reveal that emerging jobs abound in many sectors other than libraries, but

the existing job market for librarians is still traditional, particularly in the developing countries including Nigeria. This is an indication that, in Nigeria there is the need for concerted efforts from both library educators and practicing librarians to look for ways of survival and sustenance of LIS education. A study by Ogonnam and Dare (2020) reveals that the new generation of librarians want to become job creators instead of becoming job seekers after graduation. The findings of their study further showed the relevance of social media in acquiring infopreneurship skills by LIS graduating students so as to mitigate the unemployment challenges of librarians in Nigeria. Thus, partnership should be considered as one of the ways to enhance LIS education and practice in order to create more chances for employability and effective employment for librarians. In other words, when related organizations work in partnership for a specific or common goal, the outcomes are usually great.

### **Partnership and its Relevance to LIS Education and Practice in Nigeria**

The concept “partnership” has been defined in different ways and this has resulted into so many interpretations as stated below:

1. **Relationship:** Partnership means a relationship between partners for a common goal (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 11th Edition)
2. **Cooperation and responsibility:** Partnership means mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a specified goal: Neighborhood groups formed a partnership to fight crime. (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language)
3. **Group of people working together:** Partnership means two or more people or groups involved in an activity together (Macmillan Dictionary), for example, a business that is owned by partners (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 11th Edition)



4. **Partners:** these are persons joined together in a partnership. (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 11th Edition).

In the context of this paper, partnership is an arrangement that involved agreement governing the operations and services to be offered for reciprocal benefits. According to Tong and Kisby (2009), formal agreement is sign as foundation for the partnership so that the risk of failure, misunderstandings, and other unexpected issues that may arise in decision-making can be avoided. Tong and Kisby further added that, phrases such as joint-use, dual-use, and co-operative or co-managed, are usually used in a properly defined manner, to guide parties in the partnership agreement. However, they asserted that advances in technologies have made online resources available and accessible, which means partnership for physical spaces and access to print materials in libraries are no longer necessary. But, in developing countries including Nigeria, this kind of partnership is still relevant and needed for different purposes. In the opinion of Enakrire, Chisita and Adeyinka (2020), Partnership has been a common phenomenon, especially in the university environment in African countries. It brings together strategies used by experts with common interest to share knowledge and skills for mutual benefits. In this regard, the partnership is needed because LIS education and practice is increasingly facing challenges of funding, infrastructure, operational logistics, inadequate qualified personnel, lack of political will from policy makers, ineffective leadership, and so on. Hence, it becomes imperative to look for other strategies to make best use of the limited resources and improve the quality of both graduates and employees of LIS education in Nigeria.

The technological advances have indeed transformed aspects of human endeavour into digital ways of doing things. The LIS professionals are not an exception. The training and practice of

these professionals require skills and competencies that will enhance employment and employability in line with contemporary challenges necessitated by the technology. However, in view of the above discussion, it can be clearly understood that partnership is inevitable for a better future for the LIS education and practice. From which ever perspective one may look at partnership in LIS education and practice, the benefits are inexhaustible. Some of the benefits that can be derived from partnership between related organizations and the training institutions for LIS education and the libraries offering services to the society can be highlighted as follows:

- it will increase the recognition between the LIS professionals and its stakeholders including policy makers, funding authorities, information industries and donor agencies like private sector organizations and NGOs.
- it will help towards strengthening the relationship between the library and its user community
- it will enable strengthening of relationship between the library and its user community
- library resources and services will be enhanced. This means that partners may bring facilities to augment the existing ones. In this way both staff will work as a team or collaboratively for the benefit of all.

### **Some Examples of Partnerships and Successes Recorded in Nigerian Libraries**

The traditional areas of partnership among libraries, private sector and NGOs include: health, education, family planning, environmental protection, and so on. In addition, other specialized government agencies including libraries are also engaged in some partnership through co-opting or collaboration. A study by Ekere and Benson (2017) identifies partnership with libraries as key factor for the actualization of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in

Nigeria. This was because the library was found to play significant role as facilitator in creating awareness and approach to information service delivery for SDGs project in Kogi State, Nigeria. Osuchukwu, Otubelu, Ogbonna and Ndukwe (2016) also established that there are opportunities available at local and international levels which require librarians to work together with NGOs for human capital development in the society through creation, storage and dissemination of information. However, the study shows that only public libraries have real partnership with NGOs, while other libraries just indicate their intention to do so based on areas of needs. So librarians should engage into partnership with NGOs because by working together to plan and implement projects, they will learn more in project management and create other job opportunities for themselves.

Below are some examples of libraries that explores partnerships in order to enhance their resources and services. It is believed that their experiences will be useful for LIS education and practice generally, and helpful to other specific libraries. For example, Kano State Library Board initiated series of activities through partnerships and collaborations. This library witnessed great achievement because the library was transformed to meet community needs. It also became the only public library in northern Nigeria to record huge success including revenue generation. The achievements of Kano State Library Board under the partnership include the following:

- i. the library established partnership with Society for Better Life, beginning from year 2020 to date. This Society is an NGO based in Kano, which is concerned with strategic integration of ICTs and innovations. The Society was allocated a space by the library to carry out its activities while in return it provides ICT facilities, including training and maintenance, at no cost to the Library Board. The outcome of this partnership

resulted into adoption of ICTs and increased in library patronage. Digital literacy skills were also acquired by both library staff and users. Specifically, short courses on computer appreciation were organized, and certificates issued to participants. Another training on Graphics and Video Editing was also provided. Consequently, through the partnership, ICT infrastructure were upgraded and other facilities were made available to support the library operations. Some philanthropists had supported this initiative with internet connectivity, which enable the library to provide coaching for young adults that are preparing to write Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination. Similarly, the library also serves as Centre for the JAMB examinations. The Library is taking this advantage to organize professional examinations for other government agencies and private organizations ([www.facebook.kano state library board.com](http://www.facebook.kano.state.library.board.com)).

- ii. Kano State Library Board had also established partnership with Development Research and Project Centre. This is a non-profit organization that provides learning environment for females, and runs a community-based children Centre. The Library Board was supported with collections of children's books, toys, and other teaching and learning facilities. The library is using this window to organize innovative activities known as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Initiative (STEMI). A number of children were registered through their primary or secondary schools as well as by their parents. The activities are organized on weekly basis during school sessions or on daily basis during school vacation.

- iii. Kano State Library Board created American Corner in form of partnership with NGOs for sensitization towards attainment of sustainable development goals and other community-based programmes.
- iv. In addition to the above examples of partnership with Kano State Library Board, Yaba (2019) reported the partnerships that involved public libraries of FCT Abuja, and that of Zamfara and Kano States. These libraries established partnership with an NGO that implemented “Beyond Access Nigeria Library Project”. The partnership was focused on entrepreneurship training for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), basic education for the return of “Almajiris” to school, and service delivery to farmers for community development. Through this project, the library staff of Zamfara State Library Board were trained on e-library basics. This empowered them to make their e-library functional and accessible to students from neighboring educational institutions in the State.

It is interesting to note that, under the above partnership, Kano State Library Board has experienced employment enhancement. This is because the library staff become more innovative and exposed to modern ways of library user engagements. Thus, the State Government appreciated the power of partnership in libraries for improving education in the immediate communities and beyond. In this regard, more branch Libraries were established at Local Government levels, additional librarians were employed, and productivity was generally improved because of the new commitments from funding authority. Furthermore, the library achieved greater recognition from the larger community in the State. This recognition was noted through the various public lectures and other activities that were scheduled to be hosted by the

library. These include Independence Day lectures, Democracy Day lectures, Children Day Celebrations, symposiums on different local and national issues.

Another example that is worthy of mention is from Sokoto State University, Sokoto. This University explores partnership opportunities with CISCO Networking Academy. This Academy is a recognized information technology and cyber security training Centre that operates globally. CISCO is known for offering corporate social responsibility education which is aimed at empowering both teachers and students for an inclusive future and career opportunities around the globe. Thus, the University has negotiated and lunched this partnership on the 10th of May, 2023. The Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between the Academy and Sokoto State University stated as one of its objectives thus: “To equip participants of the Academy program and trainees with long term skills and/or knowledge and requisites skills needed to be successful in digitized world”.

In pursuance of the above objective, the two parties will cooperate and deploy facilities of the University to be used for the training. CISCO Academy will also be supported to deploy its programme including software, e-learning platform (Cisco Netspace), web-based curriculum, web support, virtual appearance, and other e-resource materials. The programme was structured into different modules that cover areas that include basics of IT, cyber security, networking and its associated tasks, automation, programming in python, online teaching and learning tools. The duration of each module is an average of 70 hours; out of which 40 hours will be hands-on laboratory practical.

The partnership with CISCO Academy has been considered a worthwhile relationship that many educational institutions in Nigeria, including secondary schools have entered into. In

other words, many participants that graduated from the programme have become job creators within and outside Nigeria. It is pertinent that LIS educators and practicing librarians, including information professionals in other places of work, to embrace this type of partnerships so that they can acquire skills needed to enhance employment and employability in the digital era. It should be understood that one of the greatest benefits of partnership between LIS professionals and other relevant organizations is to build new competencies to enhance employment and employability, and to secure libraries as influencers and agents of positive change in the society.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are made as a way forward:

- i. LIS schools should organize short courses on digital scholarship and other areas of deficiency to address skills gap in students and the practicing librarians,
- ii. LIS schools should engage in partnership with relevant professional organizations including NGOs, and incorporate such arrangements into their academic programmes,
- iii. Practicing library and information professionals should be encouraged to participate actively in programmes such as CISCO Networking Academy. This will provide opportunity to address challenges related to digital skills.
- iv. Library schools should involve experts from LIS related organizations to make contributions in curriculum review. This is very necessary because LIS education and practice is interrelated with different disciplines. All disciplines and professions need LIS services. Hence, it is very important to involve all stakeholders in determining the knowledge contents to be used for training.

- v. Curriculum for LIS should focus on contemporary challenges in the society. Attention should also be given to anticipatory development in the society so that adequate training can be provided to graduates and practicing librarians and information professionals. If LIS graduates and those in practice cannot contribute in solving problems brought by changes in the society as it relate to their responsibilities, then their employment and employability is at risk.

### **Conclusion**

This paper discusses LIS education and practice and skills gap associated with it in Nigeria. In this digital era, greater emphasis is placed on digital skills as jobs requirements by employers. Thus, employability of graduates is largely dependant on specific skills needed by employers of labour. Partnership is therefore, identified as a means of bridging the skill gaps for enhancing employment and employability of LIS graduates and practicing professionals. Some examples and benefits of partnership in libraries are cited as useful guide for the stakeholders in LIS to adapt. The examples shows that partnership can strengthen the voices of LIS professionals to get support from the government and prominent individuals and organizations in the immediate community and the society. Through the partnership, LIS professionals can be motivated to build confident for team work with members of other professions. The interactions with experts from related disciplines or professions such as CISCO Networking Academy, can also play significant roles towards enhancing employment and employability of LIS graduates in line with the demands of the digital era. The conclusion of this paper is that partnership has the power to enhanced employment and employability of graduates of LIS education and practice in Nigeria.



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