

**MENTORING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (LIS) STUDENTS FOR
SUCCESSFUL CAREER PATH IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

By

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Abstract

The field of Library and Information Science (LIS) is experiencing significant expansion because of new technological innovations. This expansion has created a chasm between LIS education and practices, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. The discipline of library and information science is intended to train information professionals who can employ new technologies to serve diverse stakeholders for development purposes, but with what is obtainable now, librarians in these developing countries are less equipped through formal training for the technological demand in library services. Since these skills are not fully acquired in today's library education, many strategies, especially mentoring, should be adopted at the professional, institutional, and individual levels. To ensure continuity and relevance as well as being positioned to apply best practices in the global information society. This study discussed the need of mentoring LIS students for a successful career path in this digital era, and suggested several mentoring programs that can be adopted in LIS education. Amidst several recommendations, the researcher exhorts LIS professional organizations such as LRCN and NLA to develop a formal mentoring policy that will guide the mentoring programs of LIS schools as part of their continuous learning program. This will help produce confident future professionals who possess the necessary digital skills to function effectively in a modern environment.

Keywords: Mentoring, Library and Information Science Education, Career path, Information and Communication Technology, Digital era

Introduction

The impact of current technologies on our daily lives has led to a significant expansion of the field of library and information science. The field is facing various kinds of changes and expansion that are associated with the evolving nature of the profession. For instance, Girinaidu (2016) in his research discussed how numerous information technologies designed for managing databases and documents are currently applied in knowledge management. According to him, these include data warehousing, data mining, content management, text mining, knowledge extraction, knowledge mapping, groupware, and information visualization, among others. With the introduction of new technologies in libraries, these new practices have emerged resulting in

the evolution of library and information services from their traditional methods and activities to a more advanced and technology-driven approach. These advancements, as opined by Abubakar (2021), have brought about significant and tremendous changes not only in the utilization of information but also in the structure of library services and the overall education of library and information science (LIS) globally.

According to Chu (2010), the first decade of the 21st century has brought about great changes to the field of library and information science (LIS), in part because of the deep penetration of the Internet and the rapid development of digital technologies. The author opined that such changes have naturally shaped and influenced how LIS professionals are educated and as a result, new subjects such as Digital Libraries (DL), knowledge management (KM), and information architecture (IA) have been added to LIS curricula while the core has been redefined. The discipline of library and information science is intended to train information professionals who can serve diverse stakeholders for development purposes. Therefore, graduates of library and information science programs should be equipped with professional, managerial, and generic skills, as well as crucial ICT skills, to perform their duties effectively.

The National Knowledge Commission, cited by Yadav and Singh (2012), submitted proposals on the staffing of libraries and recommended that the skills required for fulfilling the changing role of libraries are: library and information-handling skills; service orientation; ICT knowledge skills; communication and training skills; marketing and presentation skills; understanding of cultural diversity; and knowledge mapping skills. According to Joute (2019), the role of the librarian is evolving to include network specialist, information broker, systems designer, and knowledge manager, to mention only a few directions.

Library professionals are expected to serve as information service experts with varied information technology skills, which negate what the library school is offering in this part of the world. Accordingly, Ekwelem, et al (2022) observed that with what is obtainable now, librarians in developing countries are less equipped through formal training for the technological demand in library services. Asadu (2010) thinks that since these skills are not fully acquired in today's library education, many strategies, especially mentoring, should be adopted at the professional, institutional, and individual levels. This is to ensure continuity and relevance as well as being positioned to apply best practices in the global information society. The study focuses on the following: LIS education and current practices in Nigeria; Mentoring for career success in LIS, and Mentoring programs in LIS schools.

LIS Education and Current Practices

The present advancements and ongoing research in technology, specifically as it relates to information and library services, have prompted a new approach to LIS education worldwide. This shift aims to effectively prepare professionals to tackle the challenges brought about by technological advancements and to establish adaptable means of accommodating changes. According to Abubakar (2021), the challenges presented by those forces demand that LIS schools worldwide review and change the contents of their curricula with the aim of equipping their graduates with the knowledge and skills that would enable them to succeed in the ever-changing LIS marketplace. LIS education globally is adopting interdisciplinary and diverse approaches, which are introducing many new areas in the field. As a result, curricula for LIS education now feature fields such as data science, research data management, digital humanities, and many others to expand the frontiers of educational programs in LIS (Assefa & Wang, 2018).

Another key trend in most developed nations, according to research, is the adoption of the "information schools' (iSchool) movement. According to Chakrabarti and Mandal (2017), as posited by Abubakar (2021), the iSchools organization strives mainly to advance the field of information in the 21st century. Nalumaga (2016) affirms that the movement seems to have been fueled by a need for LIS disciplines to survive amidst the current technological advances by taking on new identities and disciplinary approaches. On the other hand, Chakrabarti and Mandal (2017) opined that the functions of iSchools revolve around three areas: education, research, and professional development. According to Wiggins and Sawyer (2010), this emerging ideology involves the integration of information, human beings, and technology in various organizational and social settings. Its primary emphasis is on exploring in-depth ontological questions related to information, information systems design, and human behavior in the context of information seeking and usage. Hence, iSchool movement is filling the need for library education to take into consideration the evolving information technology environment in meeting the current demand of information users and preparing LIS students for a career path in this digital age.

It is clear that one cannot acquire all the knowledge related to a profession within the limited time frame of a conventional learning environment, so also it is for LIS schools. It is not feasible for LIS schools to cover every aspect of the profession. Certain knowledge is specific and unique to particular positions and can only be acquired through on-the-job experience. Technology is constantly advancing, leading to the introduction of new roles in nearly every profession, including library services. Some of these roles are best learned through on-the-job experience or mentoring. Though internships and field work ought to expose LIS students to the practical aspect of the profession, on the contrary Lacy and Copeland (2013) opined that

researches that have attempted to evaluate internship programs tends to focus on the role of internships as predictors of students' employability and career success, thereby placing less emphasis on the professional guidance they receive and how these experiences help them shape their professional identities.

For a current-day librarian to be a proponent of the ongoing developments in library services necessitated by advancements in technology, training beyond that which library and information science education offer is required and can be mostly acquired through mentorship. According to Ekwelem, Abdulsalam, and Emmanuel (2022), technological skills are currently the predominant job-specific skills required in library services that are not learned in library school, but with the aid of a mentoring program, these skills can be shared and inculcated over some time.

Mentoring for Career Success in LIS

Mentoring LIS students provides them the opportunity to acquire, build, and refine the skills needed to be successful in the diverse and rapidly evolving library and information profession. This is because the transition from the traditional library model to the digital library model has affected professionals' roles and activities due to the new required skills. Mentoring can afford one such opportunity. Mentoring, according to Ekwelem, Abdulsalam, and Emmanuel (2022), is a learning partnership between a trained and experienced professional and a protégé or a professional in training to share technical information, institutional knowledge, and insight concerning a particular occupation, profession, organization, or endeavor. Pan and Hovde (2010), also defined mentoring as a process of learning and development based on a personal

relationship in which an experienced librarian called a mentor helps a new librarian, in this case, a student librarian called a mentee, to develop as a professional and achieve professional goals.

Expected Qualities of a Mentor

In addition to core communication skills, a good mentor is expected to have certain qualities to qualify as a mentor. I will be adopting the Aboyade, Aboyade, and Oladokun (2012) criteria. According to them, a good mentor must

- have good communication skills;
- be ready and willing to share knowledge;
- not hoard information;
- be able to interact with the mentee, be open, honest, and respect ideas;
- devote time to training the mentee;
- be able to adequately demonstrate his leadership traits and skills;
- Be able to induce subordinates to work with confidence and zeal.

According to Idoko et al. (2017), a core feature that defines mentoring relationships and distinguishes them from other types of personal relationships is that they are developmental relationships embedded in a career context. Mentoring relationships play a vital role in professional development because they are aimed at inculcating and improving skills and knowledge (Ekwelem, Abdulsalam, & Emmanuel, 2022; Nwabueze & Anike, 2016; Pan & Hovde, 2010). In the work of Ayinde (2011), the researcher emphasized that mentoring creates a supportive environment that is non-judgmental and non-competitive because it fosters trust, facilitates the sharing of information, and bases its foundation on mutual respect. The core aim of

every mentoring program in LIS education is to supplement the existing knowledge and skills of LIS students through a well-defined professional relationship with someone more experienced. This supports Sodipe and Madukoma (2013), who presented mentoring as a supplement to the professional training of librarians as it promotes skill acquisition for improved performance and success in one's career.

Conversely, it is necessary to note that career success involves both quantifiable and subjective factors that reflect an individual's growth and accomplishments in their career trajectory. Seema and Sujatha (2014) supported this view in their study when they opined that career success is also the satisfaction individuals derive from intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their careers, including pay, advancement, status, and career development opportunities. Therefore, mentoring is considered beneficial by providing career development aid that helps the mentee advance in the organization and psychosocial functions, which results in the mentee's personal growth and professional development (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Some of the opportunities mentoring provide are the development of skills, easy access to organizational resources, career satisfaction, and clarity of goals for the protégé.

Research has proven that mentoring affects the career success of the mentee positively. It has been found that individuals with mentors report more positive career outcomes than non-mentored individuals. Bozionelos (2004) and Allen et al. (2006) found that mentoring is positively related to the career success of mentors. According to their research findings, offering mentorship within a specified period was significantly associated with both objective and subjective career success. Bozionelos's (2004) study also revealed that individuals who had received mentorship (i.e., protégés) were more inclined to become mentors themselves and offer

guidance to others. Also Seema and Sujatha (2015), in their research findings, opined that providing and receiving mentoring make complementary contributions to career accomplishments and prospects. The practical implication is that receiving mentoring continues to be important for career progress even when individuals have reached organizational positions that allow them to be mentors. Therefore, mentoring has become both a human resource technique and an individual approach to career advancement.

Mentoring Programs in LIS

There are two major types of mentoring: formal mentoring (career development) and informal mentoring (psychosocial functions). Formal mentoring is usually organizationally or institutionally based, structured, and planned. The mentor-mentee relationship is decided by the assigned personnel or committee as set up by the organization. The formal mentoring programs are mainly focused on training, employee socialization, personal and professional development, sponsorship, visibility, or exposure rather than on inner-oriented psychosocial developmental functions (Seema and Sujatha 2014). On the other hand, informal mentoring is a kind of mentoring that involves the mentor selecting a mentee with whom they share a connection, with the mentor serving as a role model for the mentee. The relationship is dependent on mutual agreement, must be satisfactory to both parties, and must be characterized by a sense of closeness. This research work focuses on formal mentoring.

Different measures of mentoring programs can be adopted by library educators to ensure positive and impactful results for the career success of LIS students in this digital age. For effective results, LIS schools should focus more on the Formal mentoring on the other hand

encourage the student to informally engage in mentoring programs and activities. Some of the suggested mentoring programs are as follows:

1. Faculty/Departmental Mentoring Program

A faculty member can have a mentoring relationship with their students to equip them beyond what the LIS education curriculum offers. Faculty or departmental members that serve as mentors can offer encouragement throughout the academic program.

2. Mentoring Partnership with LIS Professional Associations and Institution.

LIS schools can affiliate with LIS professional associations to provide mentoring services to LIS students; this is because most members of these professional bodies have gained years of hands-on experience in their profession. A good example is the American Library Association (ALA), which provides numerous mentoring programs for its members and students under its scholarship program. One of them is the ACRL Dr. E.J. Josey Mentoring Program for Spectrum Scholars, which provides an opportunity to assist with the development of the next generation of academic librarians. The goal of this program, as retrieved from their platform, is to link participating library school students and newly graduated librarians who are of American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, North African, and/or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander descent with established academic librarians who will provide mentoring and coaching support, serve as a role model in academic librarianship, and provide guidance in seeking a career path and opportunities for leadership in the profession.

A good mentoring program can also serve as a great promoter of affiliate bodies and professional associations while still in school. A mentor who is involved in one or more professional associations can offer students valuable information about the associations' activities and clarify how active participation can provide one with access to a diverse range of learning opportunities as well as an extensive network of library professionals. Besides, one need not be a graduate before becoming aware of LIS associations, which can be vital links in helping one identify interests and career goals. Library professional bodies in Nigeria like the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), African Library and Information Associations & Institution (AFLIA), can advise LIS students on practical job expectations and recommend methods for establishing professional connections.

3. Alma Mater Mentoring

Library schools can also employ the help of their alumni in mentoring LIS students. An alumnus who was well mentored can be in a good position to mentor another. Jeng, et al., (1995) researched library school alumni activities at the Catholic University of America. In their findings, they observed that the alumni board created a mentoring committee to assist students through their career development. According to the researchers, the Alumni Board believes that the mentoring program holds great promise for launching library science students into successful careers. The board recognizes that mentoring will allow students to maximize their exposure to career opportunities as they interact with successful alumni, not to mention networking with the professional library communities. The same can be applied to our LIS schools here in Nigeria.

4. Mentoring Partnership with Library and Information Institutions

There is no evidence so far to indicate that library institutions and librarians working with them are partnering with LIS schools to mentor LIS students. Yet, this can be possible if given proper attention. Lacy and Copeland (2013) rightfully observed that most LIS programs are located on campuses with robust library systems. The question now is, why don't LIS schools call on their librarians' expertise? Why don't librarians take advantage of this opportunity to lead and direct the profession? Through this kind of mentoring program, LIS students can afford the opportunity to reflect on and learn from their practice, as well as reinforce their dedication to the field of librarianship. A good example is the IOWA School of Library and Information Science. The University of Iowa Libraries has a popular mentoring program in which students in the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) are paired with a University of Iowa academic librarian for a semester or longer.

Although, many LIS schools partner with related institutions to provide their students with about six months of compulsory industrial training, this alone may not sufficiently prepare LIS students to keep up with the latest trends in librarianship, as previously noted. To address this, a well-organized mentoring program can be incorporated into the internship program. Specifically, students can be matched with willing staff members who can serve as mentors. LIS students will be required to document their mentoring activities alongside their internship reports. The implementation of Institutional Partnership Mentoring program can assist students in becoming aware of recent developments in the field, as well as various approaches, and how they can improve their skills to be employed by such organizations.

5. LIS Schools Collaboration

With the aid of information and communication technology, library schools can also collaborate with other library schools within and across the nation to provide mentoring programs for their students. Since LIS education in Nigeria is still growing, collaboration with LIS schools in developed nations will benefit LIS students in Nigeria greatly. Lacy and Copeland (2013) indicate the feasibility of achieving this in their research. In their findings, they discovered that the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) at Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the IUPUI University Library partnered to create a mentorship program for LIS students who were interested in academic librarianship. According to them, the purpose of this partnership was not only to help students transition to the professional environment but also to explore how librarians and students benefit from the mentor-mentee relationship.

Recommendation

1. Library schools ought to establish a mentoring committee tasked with designing a formal mentoring program that meets the specific needs of LIS students. This committee should create and implement a working policy for the program.
2. As part of their continuous learning program, LIS professional organizations such as LRCN and NLA should develop a formal mentoring policy that will guide the mentoring program of LIS schools. This will help produce confident future professionals who possess the necessary digital skills to function effectively in a modern environment.
3. The mentoring programs should aim to equip students with the digital skills necessary for 21st-century librarianship, which many library schools are yet to provide. In other words, the mentoring program ought to bridge the gap between theory and practical experience.

4. To increase the success of mentoring programs, it may be beneficial not to make it a mandatory requirement for graduation. By making the programs optional, the number of participating students can be limited, and LIS schools can better monitor the program's progress. As such, the researcher recommends that LIS schools offer voluntary participation in mentoring programs to interested students at all levels of the program they provide.

Conclusions

Mentoring is essential for fostering career development, building teams, realizing aspirations, and managing employees. However, it is common for library schools to inadequately equip graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to overcome the challenges encountered both within and outside the school. Therefore, one can unarguably posit that mentoring plays a vital role in facilitating the personal, social, psychological, and professional development of information professionals, in this case, LIS students. The numeric strength of staff members in LIS schools may be insufficient to offer mentorship to all students who might be seeking for it. Therefore, it is crucial for LIS schools to partner with individuals and organizations, as outlined in this research, to provide effective mentorship services to their students. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary for these schools to attract, retain, and utilize the skills of various individuals who can provide appropriate mentoring support. It should be noted that students who receive proper mentorship and effectively manage their careers are more likely to achieve career success, fulfillment, opportunities, and dedication to their life pursuits.

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