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RESEARCH COLLABORATION AMONG LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (LIS) PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA IN THIS DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

The paper investigated research collaboration as a tool for professional development among Library and Information science Professionals in Nigeria. Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprises of all the professional librarians as NLA members in Rivers and Delta states. The findings of the survey showed that the professional librarians as members of NLA Delta and Rivers States are highly involved in research collaboration. The study also revealed the relevance of research collaboration and it was observed that research collaboration brings about higher quality of result in the LIS profession and not for fun and pleasure. The study identified challenges such as lack of time, low cooperation among collaborators, technological issues, geographical distances and cultural difference along with other challenges that can affect research collaboration among LIS professionals. Finally, it was revealed that familiarity with digital technologies, openness among collaborators, and mutual respect amongst others can help to improve research collaboration in the LIS profession. The researchers made some strong recommendations that will foster research collaboration among LIS professionals

Keywords: Research Collaboration, LIS Professionals, Digital Era, Professional Development

Introduction

Research collaboration is one of the several activities of continuous professional development (CPD) for Library and Information science (LIS) Professionals. Professionals in Library and Information Science must be involved in research collaboration because it is no longer an option but a necessity. The world around librarianship is changing rapidly with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and social media influencing how, where and when users access library resources and services. Majority of our institutions in Nigeria still offer traditional services, which in this digital age can be seen as a threat. In order to meet or satisfy the needs of their users, LIS professionals must engage in research collaboration. The involvement of LIS professionals in research collaboration will result in broader and deeper input from other professional colleagues with a range of perspectives, expertise, and experience, which will help to alter the role of the library and move beyond the conventional services provided to users.

Collaboration is the process of working with someone or a group of people to achieve a common objective. Depending on the situation and objectives, collaboration can take different forms. Regardless of the form it takes, collaboration involves defining set goals together with others, sharing responsibilities, and working together to achieve much more than could be achieved by an individual. The literature on libraries and information science has emphasized a number of key terms, including cooperation, networking, consortium and partnership. Collaboration is crucial to the development of Library and Information Science (LIS) as a discipline and a profession. In an academic setting, teaching and learning are crucial, but research is essential for enabling knowledge creation, dissemination, and professional development among LIS professionals. Research is increasingly achieved through collaboration, a concept that is widely known and understood in academia. Through collaboration, nations and organisations import and adopt ideas,

policies, share knowledge and expertise, all of which encourage researchers to continue investigating the dynamism, effects and benefits therein (Fari, 2021; Abbas, & Jawaid, 2019).

The digital era has brought about monumental transformation in the academic landscape, and the rise of digital library services within the learning environment. This development has placed enormous expectations on higher education institutions to deliver programs and products that match today's societal needs. This digital environment fosters the development of teaching and learning techniques, as well as social and physical infrastructure. Additionally, it encourages the development of professional learning networks where educators can connect, exchange best practices, and apply knowledge in the classroom. It also permits equitable access to high-quality learning tools, technologies, and resources; and also support expanded community in learning, both face to face and online. By collaborating in research, the classroom, and the libraries, LIS professionals can foster such an environment. Additionally, collaboration between educators and professionals in the field helps to develop the professionalization of library and information science (IFLA, 2012).

Academics from all over the world, including those who study library and information science, have become more interested in collaborative works. Collaboration is the key to implementing successful library and information services as well as efficient and effective educational programs. Collaboration among LIS professionals can result in building 21st century professional skills in the students as well as quality and meaningful professional education.

Statement of the Problems

In order to achieve a common and uniform practice, collaboration gives experts and researchers the chance to work together, fine-tune ideas, and develop strategies for multi-dimensional thinking. The management of LIS education programs, libraries, and information

services has been seen as a strategic activity that involves collaboration among LIS professionals. The professionalization of LIS is developed through collaboration among LIS professionals. Academic research collaboration has a variety of advantages, which include; expanding one's horizon of thought, reduce costs, making data more accessible and verifiable, utilizing other people's facilities and equipment, encouraging peer review, establishing formal ties, and improving recognition among colleagues, particularly those in the same field. Therefore, collaboration among LIS professionals has thus become an inspiring tool for the success of the profession. However, despite the enormous benefits of collaboration, there are potential challenges that affect effective collaboration among them. The challenges that may affect research collaboration among LIS professionals include lack of commitment, lack of relationship, and lack of respect to other colleagues amongst others. It is obvious that, without effective collaboration among LIS professionals, the profession is likely to lack relevance. It is on this premise it becomes imperative for the researchers to take a look at the challenges and prospects of research collaboration among LIS professionals in the digital era.

Objectives of the Study

The study is meant to look at the challenges and prospect of LIS professionals in research collaboration in this digital era. However, the study specifically sought to:

1. find out the extent of involvement in research collaboration among LIS professionals
2. find out the relevance of research collaboration on LIS professionals
3. examine the factors affecting effective research collaboration among LIS professionals
4. suggest ways of improving research collaboration among LIS professionals

An Overview of Research Collaboration among LIS Professionals

Working as a team, researchers from various institutions and backgrounds are frequently able to solve the most pressing scientific problems or develop the most cutting-edge technologies. The merging of different fields can enable the accomplishment of incredible goals and objectives. Therefore, research collaboration can be summed up as research that involves coordination between researchers, institutions, organisation, and/or communities. This kind of collaboration can give a project unique expertise. Collaboration can take place at five different levels: within disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, or national vs. international. It can also take the form of voluntary associations, consortia, federations, affiliations, or mergers. Research collaboration offers the potential for cross-disciplinary idea exchange, the development of new skills, access to funding, improved results, revolutionary advantages, and individual factors like fun and pleasure.

Collaboration promotes the development of effective communication and partnerships and provides equal opportunity for all team members. Collaboration also increases the ethical conduct maintaining honesty, integrity, justice, transparency, and confidentiality. Increased collaborations can save considerable time and money, and most often, ground-breaking discoveries come through collaborative research (Bansal et al 2019).

In academic research, the term "collaboration" typically refers to an equal partnership between two or more academic faculty members who are pursuing mutually beneficial and interesting research. In order to boost productivity, share research costs, and acquire new knowledge and skills, academic research collaboration has been steadily increasing in the LIS profession. Research collaboration can be seen as a system to functionally relate a group of researchers together to conduct research that produces outcomes that are advantageous to all parties involved. According to Keraminiyage, Amaratunga and Haigh, (2009),

"Research collaboration is defined as a system of research activities by several actors related in a functional way and coordinated to attain a research goal corresponding with these actors' research goals or interests".

The term "Collaboration" refers as a joint process of working, learning and sharing, specifically focused on teaching, learning and research activities between learners, where knowledge can be activated and shared.

There are several considerations to keep in mind when deciding whether to collaborate and with whom. It's important to have emotional intelligence; keep in mind your preferred learning method; and give everyone the chance to share their perspective. Additionally, compromise, flexibility, and an open mind are necessary for successful collaboration. Working with others entails the necessity of a group leader or moderator, but it also means that no one person should have the authority to completely overrule the other members of the team (Cole, 2017; Knackendoffel, 2007; Donham, 2013).

It is important to understand your partner(s)' perspective on a project; it will go a long way in making the collaboration move smoothly. Not only are some projects unsuitable for collaboration, some partners are not up to the task either. Having collaborators on a project is not sufficient; the collaborators must be very willing to make a significant contribution to its success. However, it is very sad to note that some collaborators do not care about the project until its being published. Sometimes, they just pay part of the publication fee or offer to bear the cost of the whole publication without contributing intellectually to the project.

Furthermore, it takes a lot of work to collaborate with others. As stated in a publication by University of Wisconsin (2014), "partnerships must also be maintained, developed, and adjusted based on the dynamic nature of education and technology." This includes building relationships, establishing trust, creating a framework within which

everyone can function, and even just getting the people you need on board takes persistence, patience, and resilience. All of this takes time, effort, and advocacy at all levels

A recent work by Mcclunie-Trust, et al. (2022) revealed that research collaboration is a coalition between researchers who share common goals, aspirations, and responsibilities in carrying out research. Research talent is brought together through collaboration between institutions and across national boundaries to work on complex projects that would be challenging to carry out in isolation (Carr, Walt, Watson, & Linda, 2013). A well-built team brings together a group of individuals with a collective set of resources, skills, and research experience beyond that of individual researchers, some of whom may have had experience with prior research collaboration (Mcclunie-Trust, et al, 2022).

Benefits of Research Collaboration Among LIS Professionals

Research collaboration by LIS professionals, particularly those working in academic libraries, can help to reduce duplication of effort, increase efficiency, reorganise work processes, and free up time for more value added activities. Beyond the current user base, it can also raise the profile, visibility, credibility, and influence the library and library staff. This can occasionally lead to a greater understanding of the professional abilities and knowledge of library staff members and the contribution they can make, changing the role of the library and expanding its scope beyond the delivery of basic services. Additionally, LIS professionals and library staff gain new knowledge and behaviour through collaboration which can be apply to their work, department or institution (Atkinson, 2019).

Collaboration with better known colleagues within a discipline can also gain stronger “sponsorship” in proposals to editors and among referees (Baethge, 2008; Pirani & Hussain, 2019), as well among colleagues who could then cite the publication (Schmidt & Graversen,

2018). Research collaboration has several advantages, including verifiability, stability over time, data availability and ease of measurement (Dlamini, Mlambo & Masenya, 2021).

Al-Suqri (2010), who was cited by Malik and Ameen (2018), identified that collaboration would improve academics' and students' mobility between departments for delivering and joining courses and training, accessibility to more resources and jobs, reduction in duplication and costs of research. It would increase the quality of education and research publications. Similar to this, Atkinson (2019) outlined other benefits of research collaboration by LIS professionals:

- Research collaboration by LIS professionals have greater satisfaction in decision making.
- Research Collaboration improves recognition among colleagues especially those in the same field through enhanced visibility.
- When LIS professionals collaborate in research, it brings about broader or wider research coverage.
- It gives room or advantage of sharing, utilizing other facilities and equipment owned by others.
- Research collaboration by LIS professionals improves personal competencies, with positive effects on the quantity and quality of publications. Such results emanated from the research will also give rise to evident advantages for institutions and the nation at large.
- Research collaboration by LIS professionals help to change the role of their activities from traditional to digital.
- Research collaboration by LIS professionals increase productivity, share research costs, achieve new knowledge and skills especially in this digital age.

- Research collaboration is also part of the criteria for promotion to higher ranks in some academic institutions.

Challenges Faced by LIS Professional in Research Collaboration

A successful collaboration must have partners who are dedicated, committed, and willing to work hard. The most commonly discussed factors that prevented successful collaboration in the field of LIS are Lack of time, money, human resources, IT infrastructure, willingness, government regulations, and a difference in cultures and values (Ocholla, 2008 in Malik and Ameen, 2018). He further categorized the obstacles into three general categories, including time and cost, location, and psychological factors.

According to Atkinson (2019), there can be big cultural and working style differences between collaborations. It may take some time to bring about the necessary cultural change. Some partners might be averse to change and fail to recognise the advantages of collaboration; as a result, they might feel uncomfortable working outside their institution or domain. Staff involved in the collaboration may not have sufficient autonomy in allocating their time and effort, and, if they retain some of their normal responsibilities, there may be competing priorities. Other challenges are outlined below:

- Sometimes, collaborations are often spoiled because of misunderstandings among the participants.
- Discontent with inactive or a slow collaborator.
- Lack of cooperation among collaborators.
- Policies of academic institution regarding to joint authorship for promotion.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The questionnaire was used as data collection instrument. The targeted population of the study are NLA members from Rivers and Delta State. Questionnaires were sent online via Google form to the association WhatsApp platforms in order to get responses from the members. The use of online forums for the collection of research data has been supported by many scholars (e.g., Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003; Couper, 2000; Smedley & Coulson, 2018). According to Cummings, Sproull, and Kiesler, (2002), online forums can play an important role in assisting individuals to share important ideas, such as research ideas, or management of various challenges. The link to the questionnaire was shared multiple times on the Rivers/Delta state NLA WhatsApp forum within a period of 5 weeks. The process brought in a total of 46 responses from the two states which was used to analyse the data.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	13	28.3
Female	33	71.7
Total	46	100
Age		
25-35	8	17.39
36-45	18	39.13
46-55	13	28.26
56 and above	7	15.22
Total	46	100
Rank		
Professor/Chief Lecturer	0	0.00
Head of Library (Academic, Public etc)	0	0.00
Associate Professor./Deputy Librarian	2	4.35
Senior Lecturer/Principal Librarian	8	17.39
Lecturer 1/Senior Librarian	13	28.26
Lecturer 2/Librarian 1	9	19.57
Lecturer 3/Assistant Lecturer	8	17.39
Assistant Librarian	3	6.52
Others	3	6.52
Total	46	100
Years of Working Experience		

1 – 10	25	54.35
11 - 20	15	32.61
21 - 30	3	6.52
31 - 40	2	4.35
41 and above	1	2.17
Total	46	100

From the above data, it shows that female responded more than the male which could be concluded that the female in Rivers/Delta state NLA are more involved in research collaboration work than the male. It also shows that members between the age of 36-55 do more research than others. The data further shows that the rank of assistant lecturers to senior lecturers are more involved in research. This could be attributed to the fact that they need it for further career advancement. Finally, the data on table 1 shows that as members of NLA progress upwards in their careers, they are less involved in research activities.

Table 2: Extent of involvement in research collaboration

Extent of Involvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	15	32.61
High	22	47.83
Low	9	19.57
Very Low	0	0.00
Not Too Sure	0	0.00

Table 2 shows that out of the 46 respondents, 22(47.83%) has a high extent of involvement in research collaboration while 15(32.61%) has a very high extent of involvement which is very commendable. This results coincides with that of Delasalle (2014) and Ibe, Onyeagbako and Ezere (2020) who are of the view that research collaborations are always a welcome idea in any organization set out to yield positive returns and that a huge number of individuals especially in an academic setting, are involved in different types of research collaboration and sees it as a worthwhile endeavor.

Table 3: Relevance of research collaboration

S/N	Relevance of Research Collaboration	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Learning new skills/ideas	19(41.30%)	26(56.52%)	1(2.17%)	-
2	Higher quality of results	9(19.57%)	35(76.09%)	1(2.17%)	1(2.17%)
3	Access to funding	6(13.04%)	26(56.52%)	12(26.09%)	2(4.34%)
4	Exchanging ideas across disciplines	17(36.96%)	27(58.69%)	1(2.17%)	1(2.17%)

5	Fun and pleasure	5(10.87%)	14(30.43%)	22(47.83%)	5(10.87%)
6	Improve institutional quality	11(23.91%)	31(67.39%)	4(8.70%)	-
7	For promotion at work place	17(36.96%)	24(56.17%)	4(8.70%)	1(2.17%)
8	Wider coverage	13(28.26%)	32(69.57%)	1(2.17%)	-
9	Access to data/facilities	12(26.09%)	28(60.87%)	4(8.70%)	2(4.34%)
10	Save time and money	9(19.57%)	30(65.22%)	5(10.87%)	2(4.34%)

In table 3 above, majority of the respondents agree that research collaboration is relevant to LIS profession because it produces higher quality of results, promote wider coverage and save time and money. Most of the respondents disagree that research collaboration brings about fun and pleasure. The result of this finding is in agreement with Bansal, Mahendiratta, Kumar, Sarma, Prakash and Medhi (2019) study which revealed that increased collaborations can save considerable time and money, and most often, groundbreaking discoveries comes through collaborative research. Atkinson (2019) also revealed in his work that external collaboration help to provide a wider range of services than the partners could provide individually which is in consonant with the present study.

Table 4: Factors affecting research collaboration

S/N	Factors Affecting Research Collaboration	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Geographical location problems	10(21.74%)	23(50%)	12(26.09%)	1(2.17%)
2	Lack of time	8(17.39%)	26(56.52%)	11(23.91%)	1(2.17%)
3	Lack of cooperation among collaborators	10(21.74%)	29(63.04%)	7(2.17%)	-
4	Unwillingness of sharing or working together	8(17.39%)	25(54.38%)	13(28.26%)	-
5	Misunderstandings among the participants	3(6.52%)	29(63.04%)	14(30.43%)	-
6	Incompetent researchers	3(6.52%)	21(45.65%)	22(47.82%)	-
7	Cultural differences	4(8.70%)	24(56.17%)	17(36.96%)	1(2.17%)
8	Technological issues	6(13.04%)	29(63.04%)	10(21.74%)	1(2.17%)
9	Lack of fund	12(26.09%)	27(58.69%)	6(13.04%)	1(2.17%)
10	Institutional policies on collaborative work	8(17.39%)	25(54.38%)	12(26.09%)	1(2.17%)

Table 4 showcase the various factors that can affect research collaboration. It was observed from the findings that lack of cooperation among collaborators, misunderstandings among participants, technological issues, lack of fund and time, institutional policies and cultural differences were the major factors affecting research collaborations while incompetent researchers do not affect research collaboration at such. The findings can be collaborated with the study of Malik and Ameen (2018) who stated that the most commonly

discussed factors that prevent successful collaboration in the field of LIS are Lack of time, money, human resources, IT infrastructure, willingness, government regulations, and a difference in cultures and values.

Table 5: Ways of improving research collaboration

S/N	Ways of Improving Research Collaboration	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Cooperation among collaborators	22(47.82%)	24(56.17%)	-	-
2	Trust and openness by collaborators	22(47.82%)	24(56.17%)	-	-
3	Rules and guidelines should be clearly defined to avoid misunderstanding	19(41.30%)	26(56.52%)	1(2.17%)	-
4	Mutual respect for each among collaborators	17(36.96%)	27(58.69%)	2(4.34%)	-
5	Willingness to give and take constructive criticism	16(34.78%)	30(65.22%)	-	-
6	Familiarity with technology, including social media	15(32.61%)	29(63.04%)	1(2.17%)	1(2.17%)

Finally, table 5 reveal ways research collaboration can be improved. It shows that all the items listed are ways to improve research collaboration among LIS professionals. This finding is backed up by Smith (2017) who reported in his study that research collaboration can be successful if participant are familiar with digital technologies and cooperate among themselves.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study surveyed the challenges and prospects of research collaboration among Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in this digital era using Rivers and Delta State as case study. The results showed that members of NLA in Rivers and Delta state have high extent of involvement in research collaboration. The study revealed the relevance of research collaboration and it was observed that research collaboration brings about higher quality of result in the LIS profession and not for fun and pleasure. The study also revealed that lack of cooperation among collaborators, technology issues as well as cultural difference can affect research collaboration among LIS professionals. Finally, it was revealed that familiarity with digital technologies, openness among collaborators, and mutual respect

amongst others can help to improve research collaboration in the LIS profession. From the foregoing, the researchers therefore recommends as follows:

1. Senior colleagues in the profession especially Heads of libraries should help in not only mentoring but foster the right environment for emerging librarians to get actively involved in research collaboration.
2. Senior colleagues should be actively involved in research collaboration because their ideas and wealth of knowledge can bring about ground-breaking research which will increase academic opportunities.
3. There should be mutual respect and cooperation among collaborators in order not to discourage others from collaborating.
4. Collaborators should deeply be involved in cross fertilization of ideas and not leaving the research work for one or a few individuals among them.
5. LIS professionals should take full advantage of digital technologies that will break the barrier of distance and other geographical factors.
6. Finally, management of academic institutions should have institutional policies that facilitate and encourage research collaboration. Policies on appraisal of academic staff involvement in research collaborations should be serve as a motivational factor in encouraging more collaborations.

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