

RESEARCH COLLABORATION AMONG LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS IN UNIVERSITIES IN DELTA AND EDO STATES, NIGERIAN

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Abstract

This study investigated research collaboration among library and information science educators and practitioners in universities in Delta and Edo states, Nigerian. A descriptive research design was used for the study. The population of the study was 106 respondents which comprised of library educators and practitioners in public universities that offer Library and Information Science in Delta and Edo states. Total enumerative sampling technique was adopted due to the small size of the population. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Descriptive statistical tools were used for data analysis. It was found that the extent of research collaboration among the LIS educators and practitioners in diverse areas is small. The necessity for research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners includes a paradigm shift in the LIS profession and enhancement of the ability to accomplish the mutual goal of the LIS schools and academic libraries. The factors that contributed to successful research collaboration among the LIS educators and practitioners included shared vision, trust, and mutual respect. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the LIS educators and practitioners should engage in research collaboration to cross-fertilize ideas on contemporary issues in LIS education and practice.

Keywords: Research, Research Collaboration, LIS Educators, LIS Practitioners

Introduction

Research is a process of systematic inquiry marked by the aim to discover, interpret and amend facts, theories or applications in any field of knowledge. It entails gathering data for analysis which answers a specific query or solves a given issue (Merriam-Webster 2024). Research helps in generating new knowledge, informing implementation and contributing towards evidence-based decisions (Creswell 2021). In the world at large, library education and practice has been supported by promoting effective collaboration; even though research can be done alone or with other members, it is used as an important tool in all higher learning institutions. Collaborative research has lately become popular and involves sharing ideas and information among members who work as a team towards achieving common goals. Essentially, collaborative research is intended to generate new ideas collectively aimed at improving communication and cooperation.

Crucial to the advancement of the discipline and applying academic findings practically, research collaboration in Library and Information Science (LIS) has been increasingly recognized as a trend in today's academia (Ibe *et al.*, 2020). Several people or institutions involved in one study are referred to as research collaboration. This cooperative

approach enables researchers to pool their resources, expertise, and knowledge together to enhance the quality of research outputs. In jLIS, educators often conduct collaborative research with practitioners and occasionally other stakeholders such as government officials or community-based organizations. Research collaboration refers to the partnership between individuals who have different backgrounds and experiences but can carry out a study that can solve particular societal problems (Tella *et al.*, 2012). In research collaboration, scholars' capabilities are combined (Salami *et al.*, 2021). People can collaborate either singly or collectively through teams or groups on units/organizations/nations. It is necessary for LIS education advancement and library provision/delivery programs that involve partnerships among nations. The aim is to guarantee that the quality of LIS educational programs is high and that library services are user-centered, effective, and efficient. Moreover, collaboration of LIS educators and practitioners can enhance the professionalization of librarianship.

There are a number of reasons why it is crucial to have research collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners: it encourages the exchange of theoretical perspectives and hands-on encounters leading to inclusive research findings (Smith, 2021); cooperative undertakings usually yield inventive answers in tackling intricate library scenarios (Jones & Lee, 2020); the development of educators and practitioners' skills and knowledge can be achieved through mutual learning opportunities (Brown, 2022); thus collaborative research could help shape the curriculum content that keeps pace with current professional demands in LIS education (Wilson *et al.*, 2023). Such research is typically conducted with a common goal or question of interest to all parties. They also share resources such as data, funds, technology and expertise to support the research process (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

This collaboration often spans across different disciplines and combines diverse outlooks and methodologies aimed at solving complex problems (Martinez, 2023). There are several advantages that come with this kind of engagement in terms of knowledge sharing; professional growth and building on existing skills (Nguyen & Patel, 2024). It is obvious that there are no scientific advances without team work in research. An academic discipline like LIS and an occupation such as librarianship critically need research collaboration because the whole fashioning might be advanced by these professionals working together, educational programs can be innovated upon and library users' changing wants can be responded to. Consequently, there is a requirement for LIS educators (instructors at the LIS department) and practitioners (university librarians) to jointly conduct research, thus advancing teaching and professional activities in the LIS domain. Therefore, Delta and Edo States Universities in Nigeria will form the subject of study herein focusing on LIS educators and practitioners respectively.

Statement of the Problem

Collaboration between educators and practitioners bridges the gap between theory and practice, leading to innovations in library services, enhanced educational strategies, and the development of evidence-based practices. Collaborative research has led to the promotion of open access publishing, making scholarly work more accessible to the public (Kim &

Hernandez, 2020). Which in turn fosters a dynamic partnership culture of continuous learning and improvement, benefiting both academic institutions and library environments by enhancing innovations in teaching, research, and scholarship in universities. As such, research collaboration is seen as a practical way of advancing knowledge.

Despite these benefits accrued on research collaborations, the researcher has observed from preliminary investigations that there is still a low rate of collaboration between Library practitioners and LIS educators, thus the study aims to investigate the extent of research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. By Addressing this gap, the study seeks to provide valuable insights on the various arears of collaborations among LIS educators and practitioners.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. find out the extent of research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in diverse areas in universities in Delta and Edo State Nigeria;
2. explore the necessity for research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities; and
3. examine the factors that contribute to successful research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities.

Research Collaboration

The quest for knowledge necessitated human beings to encounter problems that they have to solve for the betterment of their lives and society at large. Human beings come across diverse difficulties in their efforts to enhance their living and working patterns. Solving such problems requires them to carry out research. Such research can be carried out by a single researcher or a team of researchers in the form of research collaboration. Research is an activity for creating knowledge in human society (Ibe *et al.*, 2020). Research collaboration entails two or more researchers jointly conducting research to solve an identified problem (McNamara, 2012). Research collaboration is a way through which researchers who identify the various aspects of a problem jointly engage in research to provide a solution to the problem for the benefit of society (Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018).

In research collaboration, researchers identify a problem and work together to produce innovative scientific knowledge to solve the problem (Leite & Pinho, 2017). Research collaboration is an activity through which scholars who have interrelated knowledge and competencies work together to create novel scientific knowledge or increase the frontier of knowledge in a certain field (Adekoya, 2023). Researchers are encouraged to engage in research collaboration to enhance the number and quality of research.

Necessity for Research Collaboration among LIS Educators and Practitioners

Enhancing LIS education and practice through research collaboration is a necessity in the educational environment (Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018). This is because the contemporary information environment offers several educational responsibilities to LIS educators and practitioners. This has accorded them prospects to occupy a more central role

in LIS education and practice. Lillard and Wales (2003) encouraged LIS educators and practitioners to work in harmony in seeking creative methods to fortify LIS education and practice. Promoting a closer collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners via a series of research helps ensure that library education satisfies the demands of the profession (Bruce, 2001). Failure of LIS educators and LIS practitioners to collaborate will also affect the quality of teaching and research in LIS. Academic librarians as educators and information providers have to enhance their teaching prowess and professional practice with collaborative efforts.

Through research collaboration, the capability to accomplish the mutual objectives of the LIS schools and academic libraries can be significantly strengthened (Bruce, 2001). This will also enhance the capability of faculty and librarians in ameliorating the quality of teaching and learning, research, and library and information services (Goulding & Walton, 2013). Raspa and Ward (2000) stated that LIS educators and practitioners have to engage in research collaboration because of the transformations in the higher education environment as well as the paradigm shift in the LIS profession which is incessantly changing the roles of librarians in society. More so, the current global digital revolution has caused academic transformation, an online learning environment, and vast anticipations for LIS educators and practitioners to offer programs and services that match the needs of society (Nichoolas *et al.*, 2011).

The 21st-century educational environment requires LIS educators and practitioners to work together, share best practices, and incorporate skills into classroom practice and practice (Bennett & Simning, 2010). Such an environment can be created through collaboration in the classroom and the libraries. More so, studies (Sacchanand, 2012; Adekoya, 2023; Klett, 2013) have shown that ensuring a close relationship between LIS educators and practitioners is a vital element in producing an environment that fosters information literacy instruction. Research collaboration is, therefore, required to ensure that the teaching and designing of information literacy in the higher education curriculum in the modern era of ICT align with the contemporary realities and demands in the labor market (Chen, 2011).

Factors for Successful Research Collaboration among LIS Educators and Practitioners

In the current era, as the relationship between LIS educators and practitioners progresses from being a standalone to a collaborative research effort, opportunities and collective capacities increase thereby expanding the productivity of librarians (Sacchanand, 2012). The capacity of individual libraries equally widens as the collaboration ushers in new ways of reinventing local resources, at least in part, into high-touch services and events best managed in the libraries (SLASIAC Study Group Report, 2020). With this, the libraries can tactically shift services and activities to collective undertakings and collaborations not simply to react to critical matters but equally to continue to enhance their capacities in providing vital services and infrastructure.

Research as an expensive adventure involves significant human, economic, and technological resources. At present, there is substantial apprehension to improve the quality of teaching in Sub-Saharan African universities (Adekoya, 2023) which can happen through

research collaboration. Meanwhile, research collaboration which requires mutual agreement between the collaborators is facilitated by some factors. Klett (2013) identified proactive team leadership, shared vision, self-confidence in contribution, open communication, and trust and mutual admiration as social factors that contribute to successful research collaboration. Brown (2004) classified the factors that contribute to research collaboration into two broad categories. These are environmental factors and social factors. Environmental factors comprise scheduled planning meetings, organizational support, and clearly stated roles. Brown claimed that scheduled planning meeting is the most suitable for goal formation, outlining purposes, organizing activities, and tracking progress, while unplanned conversation equally stimulates inventiveness and continued motivation and commitment. Organizational support gives LIS educators and practitioners more avenues for research collaboration and clearly stated roles ensure that the proficiencies of the collaborators contribute to the results.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 106 respondents which comprises of 68 library practitioners and 38 library educators in the 3 public universities that offer Library and Information Science in Delta and States, Nigeria namely: University of Benin, Edo State, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State and University of Agbor, Delta State. The entire population was used as the sample size. Total enumeration sampling technique was deployed for this study. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researcher and one research assistant. Out of the 106 copies of the questionnaire administered, 81 were retrieved representing a 76.4% response rate. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools.

Results

Research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in diverse areas

Areas of Research Collaboration	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std Dev.
Research and scholarly communication	3.06	.823
Information literacy instruction	2.74	.862
ICT application in library	2.57	1.010
Reference services	2.43	.853
Copyright and intellectual property	2.39	.840
Serials management	2.22	.848
Professional membership characteristics	2.18	1.119

Curriculum planning and development	2.11	1.017
Bibliographic control	2.03	.845
Teaching/learning process	1.96	.081
Grand Mean	2.37	0.83

Decision Rule**4.5****Table 1:** Extent of Research Collaboration among LIS Educators and Practitioners in Diverse Areas in Universities in Nigeria

Table 1, indicated a grand mean of 2.37 (Std. = 0.83). This shows that the level of research collaboration among LIS Educators and practitioners in diverse areas in universities in Delta and Edo State Nigeria is of small extent. This implies that LIS educators and Practitioners rarely collaborate in diverse areas. Even though the research collaboration area is of moderate extent in research and scholarly communication (=3.06, SD=.823), information literacy instruction (=2.74, SD=.862), and ICT application in the library (=2.75, SD=1.010).

Necessity for Research collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners**Table 2:** Necessity for Research Collaboration among the LIS Educators and Practitioners in Universities in Nigeria

Necessity	Agree		Disagree	
	No	%	No.	%
Paradigm shift in the LIS profession	73	97.5	27	3.5
Enhancement of the ability to accomplish the mutual goal of the LIS schools and academic libraries	68	84	32	16
Professional development	68	84	32	16
Improvement in the quality of research	64	79	36	21
Changes in the higher education environment	62	76.5	38	23.5
Changing roles of faculty and librarians	57	70.4	43	29.6
Enhance the capacity of LIS educators and practitioners in teaching	53	65.4	47	34.6
Cost advantages in sharing human resources	52	64.2	48	35.8

Table 2 shows the necessity for research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities in Delta and Edo State, Nigeria. LIS educators and practitioners agreed that collaboration is necessary due to a paradigm shift in the LIS profession 73(97.5%), enhancement of the ability to accomplish the mutual goal of the LIS schools and academic libraries 68(84%), and professional development 68(84%). This implies that LIS Educators and practitioners sees a high necessity for research collaboration.

Factors that contribute to successful research collaboration among the LIS educators and practitioners

Table 3: Factors that Contribute to Successful Research Collaboration among LIS Educators and Practitioners in Universities in Nigeria

Factors for Successful Research Collaboration	Agree		Disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%
Shared vision	66	81.5	34	18.5
Resilience	63	77.8	37	22.2
Trust and mutual respect	62	76.5	38	23.5
Self-confidence in contribution	57	70.4	43	29.6
Open communication	57	70.4	43	29.6
Clarity of role	54	66.7	46	33.3
Prioratisation	54	66.7	46	33.3
Operational capability	53	65.4	47	34.6
Proactive team leadership	51	63	49	37
Facilitation	51	63	49	37
Strategic overview	47	58	53	42
Scheduled planning meeting	46	56.8	54	43.2
Organizational support	43	53.1	57	43

Table 3 reveals the factors that majorly contribute to successful research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities. The study agreed that shared vision 66(81.5%), resilience 63(77.8%), trust and mutual respect 62(76.5%), Self-confidence in contribution 57(70.4%), Open communication 57(70.4%), Clarity of role 54(66.7), Prioratisation 54(66.7), Operational capability 53(65.4), Proactive team leadership 51(63) and Facilitation 51(63) are major factors that can positively contribute to research collaboration.

Results and Discussions

This study found that research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities in Delta and Edo States Nigeria is to a small extent. This may be because LIS educators only cultivate the habit of collaborating with other LIS educators, and the same is true for library practitioners. This is not good for the educational and professional development of LIS. A related study by Adekoya (2023a) also found a low level of research collaboration among LIS professionals in faculty and libraries. Meanwhile, Kammer *et al.* (2021) asserted that successful collaboration between librarians and LIS teachers can enhance the understanding of the strategies to employ in teaching and can bring positive results which will be of immense advantage to educators, practitioners, and learners. The low level of research collaboration in planning and developing curriculum is not good for LIS education. Planning and developing a curriculum for library education requires the collaborative effort of LIS educators and practicing librarians. This is to ensure that there are no significant deviations between what is taught in the classroom and the realities in the libraries (Bruce, 2001). Bennett and Simning (2010) averred that research collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners will enable the teaching and practice of librarianship to be integrated in giving the students the required education.

This study also, found that LIS educators and practitioners have to engage in research collaboration because of a paradigm shift in the LIS profession, enhancement of the ability to accomplish the mutual goal of the LIS schools and academic libraries, professional development, improvement of the quality of research, changes in the higher education environment, and changing roles of faculty and librarians. A study by Adegbaye *et al.* (2017) found that through research collaboration, LIS professionals can integrate their intellect, skills, and proficiencies to enhance the quality of their research. In a related work by Salami *et al.* (2021), it was found that the paradigm shift in LIS education and practice requires LIS educators and practitioners to engage in research collaboration. There should be a link between classroom teaching and real-world practice. The teaching provided by LIS educators and the professional practice carried out by LIS practitioners should be integrated through research collaboration. With this, the students will know how to apply in practical ways what they are taught in the class.

The factors that contributed to successful research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners in universities in Nigeria, as found in this study, include shared vision, resilience, trust, mutual respect, self-confidence in contribution, open communication, clarity of role, prioritization, operational capability, and proactive team leadership. This aligns with the submission of Davis (2011) that effective communication is a key factor for collaboration. This was buttressed by Bell (2013) who conducted a study on skills for leading libraries of the future and found that effective library leaders should have communication skills to lead and pioneer collaboration among library staff. Goulding and Walton (2013) maintained that clear communication with the other researchers that involve the collaborative initiative is very important in actualizing the purpose of the collaboration. Since research collaboration is

very significant in an academic environment, LIS educators and practitioners have to collaborate to strengthen the teaching and practice of LIS.

Leveraging the potential of research collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners enables librarians to offer vital services with immediate and long-term advantages to the users (Davis, 2011). These include giving the required support to the fulfillment of the tripartite teaching, research, and public service mission of the university; enhancement of the university's reputation and leadership; and cost savings (SLASIAC Study Group Report, 2020). The onus is on LIS educators and practitioners as information service experts to collaborate at all levels (locally, system-wide, nationally, and internationally) to carry out ground-breaking research, employing modern-day technologies in teaching, and strategies on how libraries can contribute to the attainment of the goals of the universities.

Conclusion

The need to blend classroom instruction with realities in library practice, and also enhance the mechanisms for providing effective services for the increasing users of library resources requires that both LIS educators and practitioners engage in productive collaborative research. Research collaboration enriches LIS research. Libraries that leverage the potential of research collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners can offer vital services with immediate and long-term advantages to the users. Research collaboration makes LIS programs more effective and enhances the delivery of library and information services in an academic environment. Acknowledging the library as the foundation of information practice and theory requires LIS educators and practitioners to enhance their educational and professional roles to improve and enlarge as information experts, educators, and practitioner-researchers in training the information professionals that the modern economy needs. LIS educators and practitioners can work in collaboration with a range of stakeholders through which scholarly communication and publishing can be transformed into an economically sustainable system. Such collaborative effort will showcase the dynamism and vitality of the collaborators and enhance the prominence and role of the university as a worldwide leader among research institutions that intend to enhance knowledge creation for the advancement of society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study.

- LIS educators and practitioners should incessantly engage in research collaboration to cross-fertilize ideas on contemporary issues in LIS as a way of promoting LIS education and practice.
- Universities should encourage research collaboration among LIS educators and practitioners as a way of blending teaching with practice in librarianship.
- LIS department and academic libraries should sponsor their staff to national and international conferences on research and also organize conferences on global best practices in research.

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