

Promoting Freelancing and Information Entrepreneurship in Library and Information Science to Enhance Career Opportunities for Librarians

Patricia Ngozi Ofodu Ph.D. CLN (Corresponding author)

Department of Library and Information Science,
National Open University of Nigeria.

pofodu@noun.edu.ng

+ 08083969143

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2016-171X>

Sunday J. Onuh

Enugu Study Centre Library
National Open university of Nigeria

sjonuh@noun.edu.ng

07038705678

Eunice V. Akpovire

Mainland 1 Study Centre Library, Lagos
National Open University of Nigeria

eakpovire@noun.edu.ng

07088224235

&

Mabel Nneka Okeke

Awka Study Centre Library
National Open University of Nigeria

mokeke@noun.edu.ng

08033276804

Abstract

Rising unemployment globally has led to increased interest in freelancing, offering valuable opportunities for young graduates. This research paper explores the ways freelancing and entrepreneurship could be promoted in library and information science (LIS) as a career path for librarians, providing enhanced employment opportunities. LIS now offers diverse opportunities due to advancements in digital technologies in a knowledge-driven economy. Freelancing, characterized by project-based and flexible work arrangements, enables LIS professionals to offer specialized services. It allows LIS experts to leverage their skills to create innovative products and services. The study highlights the role of ICT in transforming library services, expanding career possibilities, and reshaping the competencies required for LIS

professionals. The integration of social media, content marketing, networking, and freelance platforms has become critical for promoting freelance services and establishing personal brands. Includes are barriers that LIS face: economic constraints, professional identity, rapid technological advancements, and job market saturation, coupled with limited funding, job insecurity, and evolving user needs, hinder the career growth and satisfaction of LIS professionals. Freelancing offers flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities to specialize in areas such as digital content creation, knowledge consulting, and digital curation. Entrepreneurs in LIS can develop innovative services, including digital resource development, online training programs, and knowledge management systems, while addressing the digital divide and fostering professional development. The study presented challenges, such as time management, competition, and resource access, with strategies like structured freelancing platforms, skill development programs, networking events, and affordable training resources are recommended and educators are encouraged to integrate entrepreneurship-focused curricula to prepare graduates for self-employment.

Keywords: Freelancing, Information entrepreneurship, LIS, Enhance career opportunities, Librarians

Introduction

The general issue of unemployment, and the dynamic nature of the modern job market necessitates exploring innovative avenues for professional growth and development, particularly in specialized fields like Library and Information Science (LIS). One such avenue gaining traction is freelancing and information entrepreneurship, which are becoming increasingly viable for LIS professionals, particularly severe in Nigeria, has deeply impacted the outlook and aspirations of both graduates and those still in school. Many students complete their studies and undergo a year of youth service (NYSC), only to face prolonged joblessness, sometimes lasting over five years, with no stable income. This situation has left today's youth with limited options, though many remain resilient, actively seeking alternative ways to make a living. Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates are among those affected, often taking on various jobs to sustain themselves in these challenging times. John, Nwosu, and Simisaye (2017) emphasize the importance of LIS graduates embracing entrepreneurship through service delivery, creating diverse pathways to financial stability rather than waiting passively for traditional employment.

The more glaring thing is that the scope of freelancing has expanded, allowing professionals to establish independent services and earn an income. This shift has motivated graduates to stay engaged and productive in their specializations, finding ways to monetize their skills outside the confines of office jobs. Traditionally limited to library roles, LIS now encompasses a wide array of career options, thanks to the digital revolution and the rapid growth of information technology. Information entrepreneurship, which leverages skills to develop innovative services and products, and freelancing in LIS now enable professionals to work autonomously, offering services to a broad client base. Mohanty (2020) further supports this, noting that freelancing provides growing opportunities for young graduates, helping them to establish financial independence and achieve their potential without relying on family support.

Freelancing, broadly defined as a work arrangement where individuals offer services to clients on a project or contract basis rather than being employed full-time by an organization, provides flexibility and autonomy to professionals in various industries, including LIS (Kitching et al., 2015). Similarly, information entrepreneurship involves creating and managing innovative ventures based on the unique expertise of LIS professionals, such as knowledge management, information organization, or digital archiving (Singh, 2022). These emerging opportunities address challenges such as limited job openings in traditional library settings, enhancing the relevance of LIS professionals in today's digital and knowledge-driven economy. Freelancing and information entrepreneurship not only allow librarians to diversify their career paths but also align with the growing demand for specialized skills in areas like digital content creation, data curation, and research services. According to a recent study, freelancing in the digital age has become a transformative force, enabling professionals to leverage their niche skills while maintaining a flexible work-life balance (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). The field of LIS is particularly well-suited for freelancing and entrepreneurial ventures because professionals in this domain possess unique expertise in managing and curating information, a critical resource in the modern knowledge economy.

In this paper, we explore how promoting freelancing and information entrepreneurship within LIS can open up diverse career opportunities for librarians. By defining these concepts, examining their potential in the LIS field, and identifying strategies for their successful adoption,

this study aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on career advancement for librarians. The focus is on equipping LIS professionals with the skills and mindset required to thrive in non-traditional, self-directed career trajectories, thus enhancing their professional flexibility and adaptability in a rapidly changing labour market. These current strategies employed by freelancers to enhance their visibility and attract clients, drawing on recent studies in the field.

One prominent strategy is the use of social media platforms. Freelancers leverage platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter to showcase their portfolios, share testimonials, and engage with potential clients. According to Smith (2022), social media serves as a critical tool for freelancers, allowing them to build personal brands and establish credibility within their respective industries. The interactive nature of these platforms facilitates direct communication with clients, which can lead to increased opportunities for collaboration (Jones, 2023).

Another significant strategy is content marketing. Freelancers often create valuable content—such as blogs, videos, and infographics—that demonstrates their expertise and knowledge in their field. As highlighted by Brown (2021), content marketing not only enhances visibility but also positions freelancers as thought leaders, thereby attracting a more extensive client base. This approach aligns with the notion that providing value to potential clients can lead to long-term relationships and repeat business (Adams & Lee, 2023).

Networking is also a vital component of freelancing promotion strategies. Freelancers are encouraged to attend industry conferences, workshops, and local meetups to build connections and expand their professional networks. Research by Green (2022) emphasizes that personal referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations remain powerful tools for freelancers seeking new clients. These interactions can foster trust and credibility, which are crucial in a competitive marketplace.

Furthermore, the adoption of freelance platforms, such as Upwork and Fiverr, has transformed the way freelancers promote their services. These platforms provide a structured environment where freelancers can showcase their skills, receive reviews, and connect with clients globally. According to Taylor (2023), the use of such platforms has increased the accessibility of freelance work, allowing individuals to diversify their client base and optimize their marketing efforts.

Information Entrepreneurship in the Digital Age and ICT

In the digital age, information entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative avenue for professionals in Library and Information Science (LIS) to leverage their skills and expertise in innovative and independent ways. Information entrepreneurship refers to the process of creating and managing business ventures centered around the collection, organization, management, and dissemination of information. With rapid advancements in technology and the increasing value of data in the global economy, LIS professionals are uniquely positioned to create entrepreneurial ventures that address critical needs in areas such as digital curation, content creation, and knowledge consulting. The integration of ICT has not only increased operational efficiency within libraries but has also introduced innovative service environments that cater to the diverse needs of users. The emergence of various types of libraries such as automated, media, electronic, virtual, and digital libraries demonstrate the multifaceted nature of contemporary information services (Omekwu, 2004, in Onuoha & Obialor, 2015). Each of these library types possesses unique features, functions, and modes of service delivery that reflect the ongoing evolution of the profession. The transition to digital formats has also prompted libraries to rethink their service delivery models. The proliferation of online resources and digital collections necessitates that librarians become proficient in navigating and managing these new formats. This shift towards digital information resources has implications for user engagement, as librarians must develop strategies to promote and facilitate access to these materials effectively.

Moreover, the role of librarians as educators has become increasingly prominent in the digital age. With the rise of information literacy as a critical competency, librarians are tasked with providing instruction and guidance to users in navigating the complexities of the information landscape. This educational aspect of librarianship underscores the importance of developing effective communication and teaching skills, as librarians work to empower users to become discerning consumers of information. One significant opportunity for LIS professionals lies in digital curation, which involves the management and preservation of digital assets over time. As organizations increasingly generate and rely on digital data, there is a growing demand for professionals who can ensure the long-term accessibility and usability of these resources (Kim & Ross, 2023). LIS professionals, with their expertise in metadata creation, digital preservation,

and archival management, can establish businesses offering digital curation services to institutions such as museums, corporations, and academic libraries.

Another promising area is content creation, where LIS professionals can utilize their skills in organizing and presenting information to create engaging and accurate digital resources. This could include the development of educational content, research-based articles, and online learning modules tailored to specific audiences. As online platforms and e-learning industries continue to expand, LIS professionals can capitalize on this trend by offering high-quality, well-organized, and information-rich content (Johnson, 2023). Freelance content creation also allows LIS professionals to work across diverse industries, from education to corporate training, broadening their career prospects.

Knowledge consulting represents another entrepreneurial opportunity for LIS professionals, where they can act as information advisors or strategists for businesses and organizations. Knowledge consulting involves analysing an organization's information needs, streamlining information workflows, and implementing knowledge management systems to enhance efficiency. With businesses placing increasing emphasis on effective data use and decision-making, LIS professionals can position themselves as valuable consultants to provide expertise in areas like information governance, competitive intelligence, and research analysis (Smith & Lee, 2023).

The rise of digital platforms and networks has further enabled LIS professionals to market their entrepreneurial services to a global audience. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Fiverr, and niche LIS networks provide avenues for professionals to connect with potential clients and establish their presence as independent information entrepreneurs. However, to succeed in these ventures, LIS professionals need to combine their technical expertise with entrepreneurial skills, such as marketing, client management, and business development.

Emerging Opportunities in Freelancing for LIS Professionals

The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has significantly reshaped the landscape of library services and the roles of librarians. The integration of these technologies has not only enhanced the accessibility of information but has also transformed the

skill sets required for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals. This explores the implications of technological advancements on libraries, the evolving roles of librarians, and the critical competencies necessary for enhancing employability in the field.

Technological Transformation in Libraries: The advent of ICT has revolutionized the methods by which information is created, stored, and disseminated. Libraries now utilize a diverse array of technologies to provide users with expansive access to information resources, often without limitations. Lorver and Terungwa (2019) emphasize that these technological advancements have not only broadened the scope of library services but have also necessitated the development of new roles and skill sets within the profession. The ability to engage in freelance work and pursue flexible employment opportunities has become increasingly viable for LIS professionals, thereby enriching their career prospects.

The integration of ICT into library services has led to the emergence of various service models that cater to the evolving needs of users. As noted by Felix, Bello, and Saidu (2020), the proliferation of internet access and digital tools has fundamentally altered how information is accessed and utilized. This transformation allows librarians to respond to the demands of contemporary users more effectively, thereby enhancing user satisfaction. Anyaoku, Osuigwe, and Oguaka (2015) further assert that the shift towards digital information access alleviates some of the challenges traditionally associated with information retrieval, thereby facilitating a more user-friendly experience for both librarians and patrons.

Evolving Roles and Skills of Librarians: The role of the librarian has expanded beyond traditional boundaries due to the influence of technology. The core responsibility of providing accessible information in various formats remains paramount; however, the methods employed to fulfill this duty have evolved. Okiki and Durodolu (2018) highlight that technological innovations have given rise to new library services, including online reference, digital instruction, document delivery, and user-initiated lending. These developments underscore the need for librarians to be adept at utilizing digital tools and platforms to enhance service delivery.

In light of these changes, it is crucial for LIS graduates to cultivate a diverse set of competencies that align with the demands of the modern job market. According to Anyanwu et al. (2013), the

essential skills for LIS professionals encompass effective communication, professional ethics and social responsibility, client service, project management, creative problem-solving, marketing, financial management, human resource skills, collaboration, teamwork, self-management, a commitment to lifelong learning, technology application, information literacy, and supervisory skills. These competencies, typically fostered through various LIS educational programs, are instrumental in equipping professionals to navigate both traditional employment and freelance opportunities.

The emphasis on these skills reflects a broader trend within the job market, where employers increasingly value adaptability and a comprehensive skill set. The ability to engage in lifelong learning is particularly critical, as the rapid pace of technological change necessitates continuous professional development. As libraries increasingly adopt new technologies, LIS professionals must remain proactive in enhancing their knowledge and skills to remain competitive.

Barriers and Opportunities in LIS Careers

Barriers in LIS Careers

The landscape of Library and Information Science (LIS) careers has undergone significant transformations in recent years, driven by technological advancements, evolving user needs, and shifting institutional priorities. This examines the barriers faced by professionals in the LIS field and highlights the opportunities presented by freelancing and entrepreneurship as potential solutions to these challenges. The analysis draws from a diverse range of academic sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of LIS careers.

Economic Constraints: Economic challenges represent a primary barrier in LIS careers. Many libraries operate under tight budgets, leading to hiring freezes, reduced staff, and limited professional development opportunities (Sullivan, 2020). As noted by Hurst (2019), these financial constraints often result in job insecurity and a lack of advancement opportunities for LIS professionals. Furthermore, the disparity in funding between public and private libraries exacerbates these issues, as public libraries frequently face budget cuts that directly affect staffing and resources (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Professional Identity and Recognition: Another significant barrier is the struggle for professional identity and recognition within the broader information ecosystem. LIS professionals often contend with misconceptions about their roles and the value they provide (Baker & Edwards, 2018). This lack of understanding can lead to underappreciation of LIS skills and competencies, which may hinder career advancement and professional development. As highlighted by Wiggins and Kimbrell (2019), there is a pressing need for LIS professionals to articulate their unique contributions to information management and knowledge dissemination.

Technological Changes: The rapid pace of technological change presents both challenges and opportunities for LIS professionals. While technology can enhance library services, it also requires ongoing training and adaptation (Farkas, 2020). Many LIS professionals report feeling overwhelmed by the need to stay current with emerging technologies, which can create barriers to effective service delivery and career progression (Lankes, 2016). The digital divide further complicates this issue, as some LIS professionals may lack access to the necessary resources for skill development, leading to disparities in technological proficiency (Becker & Park, 2019).

Job Market Saturation: The LIS job market is increasingly competitive, with a growing number of graduates entering the field each year (American Library Association, 2022). This saturation can lead to underemployment and a reliance on temporary or part-time positions, which may not offer the same benefits or professional development opportunities as full-time roles (Johnson, 2021). As a result, many LIS professionals find themselves in precarious employment situations, which can hinder their career growth and job satisfaction (Hernandez, 2021).

Opportunities in Freelancing and Entrepreneurship

Despite these barriers, freelancing and entrepreneurship present viable opportunities for LIS professionals to navigate their careers more effectively. The gig economy has expanded significantly in recent years, offering flexible work arrangements and the potential for diverse income streams (Baker & Edwards, 2018). This section explores the various ways in which freelancing and entrepreneurship can help address the challenges faced by LIS professionals.

Flexibility and Autonomy: Freelancing offers LIS professionals the flexibility to choose projects that align with their interests and expertise. This autonomy can lead to increased job satisfaction and the ability to tailor work schedules to personal needs (Katz & Kruger, 2020). As noted by Farkas (2020), many LIS professionals have successfully transitioned to freelance roles, allowing them to pursue niche markets and specialized services that may not be available in traditional library settings. This flexibility can also mitigate the impact of economic constraints, as freelancers can diversify their income sources and adapt to changing market demands.

Skill Development and Networking: Engagement in freelance work can facilitate continuous skill development and professional networking. Freelancers often have the opportunity to work on various projects, which can enhance their skill sets and broaden their professional portfolios (Hernandez, 2021). Furthermore, freelancing allows LIS professionals to connect with other practitioners and potential clients, fostering valuable relationships that can lead to future opportunities (Johnson, 2021). This networking aspect is crucial in a competitive job market, as it can increase visibility and open doors to new projects and collaborations.

Entrepreneurial Ventures: Entrepreneurship presents another avenue for LIS professionals to overcome career barriers. By establishing their own businesses, LIS professionals can create tailored services that address specific community needs (Wiggins & Kimbrell, 2019). This entrepreneurial approach not only empowers LIS professionals but also enhances the visibility and relevance of the LIS field in the broader information landscape. As noted by Sullivan (2020), entrepreneurial ventures can take various forms, including consulting, content creation, and the development of digital resources, allowing LIS professionals to leverage their expertise in innovative ways.

Addressing the Digital Divide: Freelancing and entrepreneurship can also play a pivotal role in addressing the digital divide within the LIS profession. By offering online workshops, webinars, and resources, LIS professionals can provide valuable training and support to those who may lack access to traditional educational opportunities (Becker & Park, 2019). This outreach not only helps bridge the gap for underserved communities but also positions LIS professionals as leaders in information literacy and digital inclusion initiatives.

Advocacy and Professional Development: Freelancing and entrepreneurship empower LIS professionals to advocate for the value of their work and the importance of information access. By establishing their own brands and services, they can raise awareness about the critical role of libraries and information services in society (American Library Association, 2022). Additionally, entrepreneurial ventures can facilitate professional development opportunities, as LIS professionals can create and offer training programs, workshops, and resources that enhance the skills of their peers (Hurst, 2019).

Challenges Faced by Freelancers and Strategies to Overcome

Freelancing has gained popularity due to its flexibility and independence, but freelancers face numerous challenges that can hinder their professional growth. Addressing these issues is critical for the promotion of freelancing as a sustainable career option. The following discussion highlights the key challenges freelancers face and suggests measures to promote freelancing.

Time Management: Freelancers often struggle with managing multiple projects and meeting deadlines, as they are solely responsible for organizing their work schedules. This requires strong organizational skills and self-discipline. Poor time management can lead to burnout, reduced productivity, and missed deadlines, all of which negatively impact client relationships. To promote freelancing as a sustainable career, training programs on project management and time management should be made accessible to freelancers (Campana, 2023).

Limited Job Opportunities: In certain specialized fields, such as freelance librarianship, job opportunities can be scarce because traditional roles in these fields are typically full-time and onsite (Campana, 2023). To address this, governments and institutions should create platforms that specifically cater to niche freelancing markets, enabling professionals to find relevant work opportunities. For example, online freelancing platforms could collaborate with industry organizations to connect freelancers with clients in specialized fields.

Intense Competition: The freelancing market is highly competitive, with many freelancers, particularly newcomers, willing to accept low pay to secure work. This weakens bargaining power and forces many freelancers to undervalue their services (Rahman & Rahman, 2017). To promote freelancing, it is essential to educate freelancers on pricing strategies, negotiation

techniques, and the value of their skills. Governments or private entities could also introduce minimum wage policies for freelancing to ensure fair compensation.

Unrealistic Client Expectations: Freelancers frequently deal with clients who have high or unclear expectations, which can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction (Campana, 2023). Clear communication is critical to managing such challenges. Workshops on client relationship management and developing effective contracts can empower freelancers to set realistic expectations and protect their rights.

Difficulty Securing Clients: Building a steady client base is another major hurdle, especially for new freelancers competing with established institutions. Networking, marketing, and showcasing unique expertise are essential to securing contracts (Campana, 2023). To promote freelancing, government bodies and industry organizations could organize networking events, offer marketing resources, or create mentorship programs to help freelancers build strong professional networks and portfolios.

Limited Access to Resources: Freelancers, particularly those in specialized fields, may not have access to tools or resources that institutional professionals enjoy, such as subscription databases, extensive collections, or industry software (Campana, 2023). To promote freelancing, governments and organizations could provide freelancers with subsidized access to such resources. Freelancing platforms could also partner with software providers to offer discounts to freelancers.

Professional Development: Unlike employees in traditional jobs, freelancers must invest in their own professional development, often without institutional support (Rahman & Rahman, 2017). This can be a financial burden. Offering affordable or free training programs and certifications through online platforms can help freelancers stay competitive in their industries, thus promoting freelancing.

Internet and Payment Challenges: Freelancers in developing countries often face unreliable internet connectivity and limited payment options, which hinder their ability to work effectively

(Rahman & Rahman, 2017). Governments and private entities could invest in improving digital infrastructure and introducing global payment solutions to support freelancers.

Conclusion

Freelancing is often seen as a minor aspect of entrepreneurship, typically viewed as just one form of self-employment. Freelancers, especially in knowledge-intensive fields, like Librarianship are often categorized as a subset of owner-managers who provide specialized services to clients. Freelancing promotion strategies encompass a range of methods, including social media engagement, content marketing, networking, and the utilization of freelance platforms, while technology and libraries has fundamentally transformed the roles of librarians and the services they provide. LIS professionals face numerous barriers in their careers, the opportunities presented by freelancing and entrepreneurship offer promising pathways for overcoming these barriers. As the field continues to evolve, it is imperative for LIS professionals to embrace these opportunities and actively shape the future of their careers. As the digital age presents unprecedented opportunities for LIS professionals to create entrepreneurial ventures in digital curation, content creation, and knowledge consulting, by diversify their career paths and contribute to the evolving information economy, and achieve greater professional autonomy and services in the LIS profession as well-suited to capitalize on this trend.

Suggestions/Way Forward

Despite challenges, freelance librarians can thrive by capitalizing on their expertise, adapting to changing market needs, and targeting niche areas within the library sector. Key recommendations include:

1. There should be freelancers leverage platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter to showcase their portfolios, share testimonials, and engage with potential clients.
2. Freelancers should often create valuable content—such as blogs, videos, and infographics—that demonstrates their expertise and knowledge in their field.
3. Freelancers are encouraged to attend industry conferences, workshops, and local meetups to build connections and expand their professional networks.

4. There should be an adoption of structured environment where freelancers can showcase their skills, receive reviews, and connect with clients globally.
5. Graduates should pursue ongoing training to build competencies and acquire skills relevant to diverse entrepreneurial ventures and services.
6. Library schools should incorporate entrepreneurship-focused curricula that prepare graduates for self-employment.

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