

Review Article

Beyond Library Science: Reimagining the Librarian as an Interdisciplinary Mediator

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Abstract: Academic librarians are increasingly expected to function as subject experts, knowledge curators, and interdisciplinary collaborators. Yet, traditional library science education often lacks the disciplinary depth needed to meet the demands of subject-specific information services. Drawing from personal experience and reflective observation, this paper critiques the mono-disciplinary focus of library training in Nigeria and advocates for a hybrid educational model that enables librarians to evolve as professionals of other disciplines. The study proposes a structural shift in curriculum, professional identity, and policy frameworks to support librarians as active contributors to scholarly advancement across academic spectrum. From the evidence and arguments presented, the paper concluded that librarianship in Nigeria should be repositioned from a custodial, technique-centered profession to a cognitively flexible and interdisciplinary knowledge enterprise if it is to remain relevant within the 21st-century academic environment. Among others, it was recommended that Library and Information Science (LIS) curricula in Nigeria should be restructured to include formal subject-specialization pathways, such as minors, dual degrees, or certified disciplinary concentrations to strengthen contextual understanding of user domains.

Keywords: Library and Information Science, Librarianship, Reimagining, Interdisciplinary Librarianship, Mediator, Cognitive Flexibility Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, library and information science education in Nigeria is developed around the technical foundations of cataloguing, classification, indexing, bibliography, and collection management, reflecting the historical custodial orientation of the profession (Aina, 2004). Consequently, professional training within many Nigerian library schools has remained largely structured around routine technical operations with comparatively limited exposure to broader interdisciplinary competencies. While these traditional areas remain important to professional practice, the contemporary academic environment has become increasingly dynamic, technologically mediated, and research-driven, thereby expanding the scope of responsibilities expected of librarians. Academic librarians now function within environments shaped by digital scholarship, electronic information systems, data management, information literacy instruction, and multidisciplinary research collaboration. However, despite these expanding responsibilities, library education in Nigeria still

demonstrates a predominantly single-disciplinary orientation that insufficiently reflects the complexity of modern information ecosystems. This creates a disconnect between the realities of modern professional practice and the competencies developed through conventional library training. The competencies required for effective librarianship now extend beyond traditional technical knowledge into a broader cognitive, technological, communicative, and analytical domains. The expanding nature of librarianship, therefore, suggests the need to reconsider the conceptual boundaries of professional training within library and information science.

The interdisciplinary demands of contemporary librarianship become more apparent considering the diverse environments within which librarians now operate. Academic librarians interact continuously with researchers, educators, technologists, policymakers, institutional administrators, digital systems, and users whose information seeking behaviour is shaped by

psychological, technological, and social influences (Fitzgerald, 2020). Effective service delivery within such environments increasingly requires foundational understanding of areas such as communication, pedagogy, behavioural science, research methodology, digital technology, and knowledge management. Without these broader competencies, librarians may become professionally limited in addressing the complex and evolving needs of contemporary users. Although reforms such as the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) and the more recent Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) introduced modifications to library and information science education in Nigeria, these revisions still largely retain emphasis on conventional professional structures. While technological components have been expanded, the broader interdisciplinary realities shaping contemporary librarianship remain insufficiently integrated into professional training.

The need for interdisciplinary competence in librarianship may further be understood through the philosophical foundations of the profession itself. Ranganathan's laws of library science, particularly the principles that "every reader his or her book" and "every book its reader," emphasize the importance of aligning information services with the specific needs of users (Ranganathan, 1931). Within contemporary academic environments, this principle may be extended to suggest that effective librarianship also requires contextual understanding of the disciplinary communities being served. In this regard, the realities of modern academic librarianship increasingly imply "every faculty its librarian" and "every librarian his or her faculty." A librarian serving specialized academic communities in medicine, engineering, agriculture, law, or creative arts requires at least foundational understanding of the concepts, practices, terminologies, and information cultures within those disciplines in order to provide meaningful information support. Personnel psychology similarly emphasizes that effective job performance depends on the possession of competencies relevant to occupational demands. So, if librarians are expected to mediate information within increasingly specialized and interdisciplinary environments, then professional training must also evolve beyond restrictive technical boundaries. Thus, the pertinent question is whether librarians should remain narrowly trained within traditional library science frameworks or develop broader interdisciplinary expertise necessary for relevance within modern information environments.

Contemporary librarianship has witnessed a significant expansion in its professional scope as librarians increasingly function within technologically driven, research-oriented, and multidisciplinary knowledge environments. Consequently, librarians are now expected to perform roles that extend beyond traditional information organization and management to include research support, digital mediation, data

services, information literacy instruction, and knowledge consultancy. However, professional training in library and information science remains largely structured around conventional technical competencies such as cataloguing, classification, and information organization. The continued reliance on a narrowly structured disciplinary framework raises concerns regarding the preparedness of librarians to effectively function within increasingly complex information environments. This paper advances the position that librarianship should be reimagined beyond its traditional boundaries through the integration of interdisciplinary competencies necessary for effective knowledge mediation in the contemporary society. The objective of the study is to critique the mono-disciplinary structure of LIS education in Nigeria and argue for its reorientation toward interdisciplinary and subject-specialized training to strengthen librarians' role in modern academic knowledge systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Librarian Identity – Historical Professional Mode

The traditional identity of the librarian is deeply rooted in a custodial and document-centered philosophy of knowledge organization, where the primary concern was not interpretation or mediation, but preservation, order, and controlled access. Within this historical professional mode, the librarian emerged as a gatekeeper of recorded knowledge, responsible for acquiring, organizing, cataloguing, classifying, and safeguarding library materials for institutional continuity (Matonkar & Gopakumar, 2024). This identity was not accidental; it reflected the epistemic environment of earlier centuries in which information was scarce, physically bound, and largely stable in format. Libraries were designed as repositories of print culture, and librarianship developed as a technical science of order, where systems such as classification schemes, cataloguing rules, and bibliographic control became the intellectual backbone of the profession. In this configuration, professional competence was measured largely by precision in technical routines rather than interpretive engagement with users' cognitive or disciplinary contexts.

Historically, this custodial identity was reinforced by the philosophical underpinnings of early library science, particularly in the works of Ranganathan (1931), whose laws of library science formalized the idea that books exist primarily to be organized and made accessible through systematic arrangement. While Ranganathan's philosophy already hinted at user orientation, the institutional interpretation of his ideas in many developing library systems particularly in post-colonial Nigeria leaned heavily toward structure and control rather than dynamic mediation. The librarian was, therefore, conceptualized as a technical specialist whose authority derived from mastery of bibliographic systems rather than interdisciplinary understanding or behavioural insight.

The evolution of library education in Nigeria reflects this traditional identity. Early curricula in institutions such as the University of Ibadan and other foundational LIS programmes emphasized cataloguing, classification, indexing, and reference services as core competencies. As Ferretti (2020) and Tewell (2026) noted, much of twentieth-century librarianship developed within procedural and technocratic models of practice, oriented around efficient management of collections, systems, and processes rather than sustained critical engagement with users research behaviours or the disciplinary discourses in which their information needs were embedded. The librarian, in this tradition, was trained chiefly to manage collections efficiently rather than to interpret the cognitive or academic ecosystems in which those collections were used. This historical mode also positioned the library as a relatively static institution, where services were reactive rather than proactive. Users were expected to adapt to the library systems rather than the library adapting to users' evolving contexts. The librarian's role was, therefore, structurally authoritative but functionally limited in engagement with knowledge production processes. Even reference services, which introduced a more interactive dimension, remained largely transactional, focused on directing users to sources rather than co-navigating complex research problems.

However, this traditional identity must be understood not as a flaw in its original context, but as a historically appropriate response to the information realities of its time. Print-based environments required rigorous control mechanisms to prevent loss, duplication errors, and retrieval inefficiencies. Yet, as information environments have shifted toward digitization, interdisciplinarity, and user-centered knowledge production, the limitations of this custodial identity have become more visible. Thus, the traditional librarian identity represents an important foundational stage in professional evolution that established the technical architecture of librarianship, and it also serves as the conceptual baseline from which the need for interdisciplinary reconfiguration emerges.

Interdisciplinarity and Professional Identity

The concept of interdisciplinarity introduces a fundamental shift in how professional identity is understood within contemporary knowledge environments, particularly for professions traditionally anchored in technical or discipline-bound training such as librarianship. Interdisciplinarity refers to the integration of knowledge, methods, and perspectives from multiple academic or professional fields to address complex problems that cannot be adequately resolved within the boundaries of a single discipline (National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, & Institute of Medicine, 2005). This implies that in professional identity, the competence, legitimacy, and functional relevance of a practitioner are no longer derived solely from mastery of a singular

disciplinary canon but from the ability to navigate, translate, and integrate diverse knowledge systems.

In relation to librarianship, interdisciplinarity disrupts the historically stable identity of the librarian as a technically focused custodian of information. It positions the librarian as a boundary-spanning professional operating at the intersection of education, technology, behavioural science, communication studies, and domain-specific disciplines. This expanded identity aligns with the realities of contemporary academic environments, where research problems are increasingly hybrid in nature, requiring information professionals to understand not only how knowledge is organized but also how it is produced, interpreted, and applied across fields. The librarian, therefore, becomes a mediator of epistemic exchange rather than a mere organizer of documents.

From a theoretical standpoint, the evolution of professional identity under interdisciplinary conditions can be understood through the lens of role theory, which suggests that occupational roles are socially constructed and continuously reshaped by environmental expectations and institutional demands. As academic institutions transition toward digital scholarship, open science, and data-intensive research ecosystems, the expectations placed on librarians have expanded accordingly. Scholars such as Corral (2014) emphasize that academic librarians are increasingly expected to function as research partners, data stewards, and scholarly communication facilitators, roles that inherently require engagement with multiple disciplinary logics. This transformation is evident in the gradual reconfiguration of library services globally. Studies of academic libraries in technologically advanced institutions show increasing involvement of librarians in research data management, systematic reviews, bibliometrics, and instructional design. These roles require competencies that extend beyond traditional LIS training into areas such as statistics, information systems, pedagogy, and subject-specific literacy. Lankes (2011) further argued that modern librarianship should be understood as a participatory practice centered on knowledge creation and community engagement rather than passive information delivery. This perspective reinforces the idea that professional identity in librarianship is no longer static but dynamically shaped by interdisciplinary engagement.

In Nigeria, however, it can be argued that the integration of interdisciplinarity into LIS education and professional practice remains gradual and uneven. Aina (2004) observed that library education in Nigeria has historically remained heavily rooted in technical and custodial competencies, with slower incorporation of broader intellectual and interdisciplinary dimensions compared with global shifts in librarianship. Ocholla and Ocholla (2011) noted that LIS curricula in many African contexts continue to reflect a traditional structure, even

as professional environments increasingly demand digital, pedagogical, and research-oriented competencies. This creates a structural tension between curriculum content and workplace expectations, where librarians are required to perform interdisciplinary roles without fully corresponding preparatory grounding. Interdisciplinarity, therefore, does not merely expand the skill set of the librarian; it fundamentally redefines what it means to be a librarian. It transforms professional identity from a closed system of technical expertise into an open system of cognitive flexibility, contextual interpretation, and cross-disciplinary communication. In this sense, the librarian becomes someone who not only accesses and organizes knowledge but also translates it across disciplinary boundaries to support teaching, research, and innovation.

Cognitive Flexibility Theory (CFT) offers a persuasive theoretical lens for grounding the argument that librarianship is increasingly requiring a shift from rigid technical orientation toward adaptive, interdisciplinary reasoning. Rather than treating knowledge as fixed or linearly structured, the theory advances the view that understanding in complex domains is constructed through the ability to reorganize knowledge in response to changing contexts (Spiro *et al.*, 1991). This perspective becomes particularly relevant when examining the evolving nature of librarianship in Nigeria, where academic libraries are increasingly operating within technologically mediated, research-driven, and multidisciplinary environments.

At the core of CFT is the idea that effective performance in complex knowledge domains depends on the ability to move across multiple representations of information rather than relying on a single, stable framework. This argument aligns with the realities of academic librarianship in Nigerian universities, where librarians are frequently required to support users whose information needs cut across medicine, engineering, law, education, and the social sciences. Each of these domains carries its own conceptual language, methodological expectations, and information cultures. From this standpoint, it becomes reasonable to argue that librarianship in Nigeria is no longer adequately described by routine technical competencies alone, but increasingly by the capacity to shift interpretive frames depending on disciplinary context.

Within this framework, CFT provided a useful way of interpreting the librarian as a professional who continuously reconstructs knowledge rather than simply retrieving or organizing it. The task of supporting research, facilitating digital scholarship, or guiding information literacy instruction often demands that librarians interpret unfamiliar subject domains and translate them into accessible forms for users. These responsibilities suggest a form of cognitive adaptability that goes beyond procedural training and leans more toward flexible reasoning and contextual interpretation.

The argument becomes even more visible when considering the gradual expansion of librarian roles within Nigerian academic institutions. Beyond traditional cataloguing and reference work, librarians are increasingly involved in research support services, digital resource management, institutional repositories, and data-related services. Each of these roles requires engagement with different knowledge systems and the ability to connect them meaningfully for users. CFT can, therefore, be used to argue that these professional shifts are not merely administrative changes, but indicators of deeper cognitive demands placed on librarianship itself.

The structure of LIS education in Nigeria, which has historically placed strong emphasis on technical processes such as cataloguing, classification and indexing (Aina, 2004), further sharpens this argument. While these foundations remain important, they may not fully capture the interpretive and cross-disciplinary reasoning now required in practice. From a CFT perspective, this creates a gap between training and professional reality, particularly in situations where librarians are expected to function across multiple disciplinary environments without corresponding cognitive preparation. Thus, Cognitive Flexibility Theory provides a convincing basis for arguing that librarianship in Nigeria is gradually shifting toward a profession defined not only by technical expertise, but by the ability to think across boundaries, reinterpret knowledge in context, and engage dynamically with interdisciplinary information needs.

Empirical studies on contemporary librarianship increasingly indicate a shift in the professional role of librarians from traditional custodial functions toward more dynamic, research-oriented, and interdisciplinary engagements. Corral (2014), in academic libraries and research support services, provided evidence that librarians are becoming actively involved in research workflows, particularly in areas such as data management, research analytics, and scholarly communication. Her findings suggest that the academic library is no longer functioning solely as a support unit but is increasingly integrated into the research enterprise itself, where librarians contribute directly to knowledge production processes. In a related but conceptually broader contribution, Lankes (2011) examined evolving library practice and argued, based on observed developments in digital and participatory library environments, that librarians are gradually repositioning themselves as facilitators of knowledge creation rather than passive custodians of information. The author highlighted a growing shift toward interactional and collaborative models of librarianship, where the librarian-user relationship becomes central to knowledge development processes rather than merely information retrieval.

Aina (2004) provides an important empirical critique of LIS curriculum structures, observing that

library education in Nigeria remains heavily grounded in traditional technical competencies such as cataloguing, classification, and indexing. While these competencies form an essential foundation, his analysis suggests that they do not fully reflect the expanding professional realities of academic librarianship, particularly in relation to emerging digital and interdisciplinary demands. Ocholla and Ocholla (2011), in their examination of LIS education across African institutions, identified a persistent gap between curriculum design and workplace expectations. Their findings indicate that although, there have been attempts to integrate ICT and modern information management components into LIS programmes, the pace and depth of these reforms remain insufficient in addressing the complexity of contemporary library environments, especially those shaped by digital scholarship and multidisciplinary research practices. Saunders (2015) reported that academic librarians increasingly perceive their professional roles as extending into teaching, research collaboration, and instructional design. The author suggested that librarianship is undergoing an identity shift in which traditional service-oriented roles are being supplemented, and in some cases redefined by instructional and research partnership responsibilities.

When considered collectively, these studies indicate a gradual but uneven transformation in librarianship. While empirical evidence from Corral (2014), Lankes (2011), and Saunders (2015) reflects an expanding interdisciplinary and participatory role for librarians, the works of Aina (2004) and Ocholla and Ocholla (2011) reveal that formal LIS education, continues to reflect a more traditional and technically oriented structure. This suggests that the evolution of practice is currently progressing faster than the corresponding transformation of training frameworks, thereby creating a conceptual and functional tension within the profession.

Contemporary gaps – Critique of Current LIS Curriculum

The Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum in Nigeria has long served as the formal structure through which librarians are trained and inducted into the profession. However, in the context of evolving responsibilities now associated with academic librarianship, it has become necessary to critically examine whether this curriculum sufficiently reflects the realities of contemporary practice. Consequently, this paper introduces a critical appraisal of the Nigerian LIS curriculum, with particular attention to how its structure, emphasis, and orientation may or may not align with the interdisciplinary and cognitive demands currently shaping academic library environments. The identified gaps include but not limited to the following:

– Lack of Subject Specialization Opportunities

One of the structural concerns that can be raised about the LIS curriculum in Nigeria is the limited

opportunity for subject specialization within formal training pathways such as the Bachelor in Library and Information Science (BLIS) and Masters in Library and Information Science (MLIS) programmes. Although these programmes are designed as professional qualifications aimed at producing adaptable information professionals, their curricular architecture is often broadly generalist, with little room for deep immersion in specific subject domains. This raises important questions about whether such a training model is still adequate for contemporary academic librarianship, where disciplinary knowledge has become highly specialized and user expectations increasingly demand subject-sensitive support.

It can be argued that this absence of structured subject specialization contributes to the ongoing ambiguity surrounding the professional identity of the librarian. In modern academic environments, users are not merely seeking access to information; they are engaging with complex disciplinary knowledge systems that are already well-defined and highly specialized. When librarians are not adequately grounded in the conceptual frameworks of these disciplines, their ability to function as credible intermediaries becomes constrained, and this may partly explain the perception that librarianship is becoming less central to the research process. This concern aligns with the observation of Aina (2004), who noted that LIS education in Nigeria has historically maintained a strong emphasis on general technical competencies, with limited integration of broader disciplinary depth that could support more context-sensitive professional engagement.

This argument is further reinforced by Ocholla and Ocholla (2011), whose empirical work on LIS education in African contexts highlighted a persistent gap between curriculum content and the evolving demands of the workplace. Their findings suggested that while LIS programmes have gradually incorporated ICT and information management components, they still tend to fall short in equipping graduates with the interdisciplinary and subject-responsive competencies required in increasingly complex information environments. This gap becomes particularly significant in academic settings where librarians are expected to support research activities that are deeply embedded in specific disciplinary methodologies and knowledge structures.

From a professional standpoint, it may be argued that the profession risks producing broadly competent but contextually shallow practitioners who may struggle to engage meaningfully with the epistemic depth of the disciplines they serve. This concern is not necessarily a rejection of generalist training, but rather a call for a more balanced model that recognizes the increasing need for both foundational LIS competencies and subject-specific understanding. In this sense, the current generalist orientation of LIS education in Nigeria

may require reconsideration, not because it is inherently flawed, but because it may no longer fully align with the realities of contemporary academic librarianship. A more responsive approach, as implied by Aina (2004) and Ocholla and Ocholla (2011), would be one that allows for structured pathways into disciplinary specialization, thereby strengthening the librarian's capacity to function not only as an information provider but also as a credible interdisciplinary mediator within specialized academic environments.

– **Disconnect Between Training and Real-World Expectations**

Librarians are expected to function within complex academic environments that extend beyond librarianship itself, serving users whose work is grounded in disciplines such as medicine, engineering, law, education, and the social sciences. Yet, the structure of LIS training in Nigeria tends to concentrate learning within LIS-specific theories, technical processes, and internal professional systems, with limited emphasis on how these competencies translate into external disciplinary contexts.

It may be argued that this structure creates a form of intellectual enclosure, where students are thoroughly grounded in the operational logic of library science (cataloguing systems, classification schemes, indexing principles, and information organization) without equivalent exposure to how these systems interact with other fields of knowledge. The implication is that while graduates may be technically competent within LIS frameworks, they may encounter difficulty in translating that competence into meaningful engagement with the cultures of other disciplines. This situation becomes more visible in academic libraries where librarians are not merely service providers but are expected to participate in research support, digital scholarship, and information literacy instruction. These roles require a working understanding of how different disciplines construct and validate knowledge. When such contextual grounding is limited during training, the transition into professional practice may involve a steep learning curve, particularly in terms of how LIS knowledge connects to external academic domains.

Aina (2004) provided a useful basis for this concern by noting that LIS education in Nigeria has historically maintained a strong emphasis on technical and procedural competencies, which, while essential, do not always reflect the interdisciplinary realities of contemporary library environments. In a related observation, Ocholla and Ocholla (2011) highlighted that many LIS programmes across African institutions continue to experience difficulty in aligning curriculum content with evolving workplace expectations, particularly in areas requiring cross-disciplinary engagement and digital knowledge integration.

From this perspective, the disconnect between training and real-world expectations may be interpreted not as a simple curriculum oversight, but as a structural orientation that has traditionally prioritized internal professional coherence over external disciplinary integration. The consequence is that librarians may enter practice with strong mastery of LIS procedures but limited preparation for the interpretive work required to connect library knowledge systems with other academic fields. This limitation becomes particularly significant in contemporary academic environments where librarianship is increasingly defined by its ability to mediate across disciplines rather than operate within isolated technical boundaries.

– **Impact on Collection Development, User Services, and Research Support**

The absence of structured subject specialization within LIS training in Nigeria raises practical concerns that become particularly visible in core areas of academic librarianship such as collection development, user services, and research support. These functional areas depend not only on technical competence in information organization, but also on a deep understanding of disciplinary knowledge structures, research priorities, and the informational culture of specific academic fields. When such contextual grounding is limited, the effectiveness of library services may be constrained in ways that are not immediately technical, but fundamentally conceptual.

This concern can be more clearly appreciated through an analogy drawn from the medical profession. In medicine, practitioners are not only trained broadly in general medical science; they subsequently proceed into clearly defined specializations such as surgery, pediatrics, gynecology, dermatology, dentistry, oncology, and others. This progression is not accidental but reflects the recognition that effective diagnosis and treatment require deep, field-specific knowledge. It would be difficult to imagine a system in which medical practitioners remain permanently generalist and are expected to operate across all specialties without focused expertise, as such a structure would likely compromise both professional credibility and service effectiveness.

A similar logic may be applied in a conceptual sense to librarianship. When a librarian trained within a general LIS framework is deployed into a highly specialized academic environment, such as a medical library, the expectations extend beyond basic information management. The librarian is required to make informed judgments about the relevance, currency, authority, and applicability of medical literature to researchers, clinicians, and students. These decisions are not determined merely by physical attributes of information resources, but by their conceptual alignment with the knowledge structures of medicine, including terminologies, research methodologies, and evidence hierarchies.

In such situations, a librarian without adequate exposure to subject-specific frameworks may face practical difficulties in determining what constitutes credible and timely resources for medical users. This is not a failure of technical librarianship, but rather a limitation arising from insufficient disciplinary grounding during training.

In terms of user services, this limitation may also affect the quality of reference support and information literacy instruction. Users often require guidance that is not generic, but tailored to disciplinary research practices. Without a strong understanding of subject context, service delivery risks becoming overly procedural rather than intellectually responsive. Similarly, in research support functions, especially those involving systematic reviews, bibliometric analysis, or data curation, the absence of disciplinary familiarity can reduce the librarian's ability to engage meaningfully with research questions that are deeply embedded in field-specific methodologies.

This situation suggests that the effectiveness of academic librarianship is not solely determined by mastery of LIS techniques, but also by the extent to which librarians are able to interpret and operate within the knowledge systems of the disciplines they serve. In this sense, the analogy with medical specialization becomes instructive: just as medicine relies on structured specialization to maintain professional depth and credibility, librarianship in Nigeria may also need to reconsider how generalist training can be complemented with subject-oriented pathways to enhance relevance in increasingly specialized academic environments.

The Edge of Multidisciplinary Librarian – Why it Matters

The proposition of a multidisciplinary librarian emerges as a logical extension of the evolving demands placed on academic librarianship in Nigeria, particularly within institutions where research productivity, digital scholarship, and cross-disciplinary inquiry have become central to academic performance. Rather than viewing this shift as a complete departure from traditional LIS foundations, it may be more useful to interpret it as an expansion of professional capacity, that is, one that positions the librarian at the intersection of multiple knowledge systems. In this sense, the “edge” of the multidisciplinary librarian lies in the ability to move beyond technical information management into active participation in knowledge creation, scholarly collaboration, and research visibility.

Corrall (2014) observed that academic librarians embedded in research support functions, particularly in areas such as research data management, bibliometrics, and scholarly communication, are more likely to contribute directly to institutional research output and visibility. The authors posited that librarians who engage beyond traditional boundaries tend to

achieve greater relevance in academic ecosystems. This suggests that when librarians operate within multidisciplinary frameworks, their contributions extend beyond service delivery into measurable research impact. Saunders (2015) noted that academic librarians increasingly participate in teaching, curriculum support, and research collaboration, indicating that their professional identity is becoming more integrated with core academic functions rather than remaining peripheral. Lankes (2011) argued that modern librarianship should be understood as a participatory profession where librarians contribute to knowledge creation rather than merely facilitating access to it. This position becomes particularly significant when considered alongside the increasing emphasis on institutional research output and global academic ranking systems. In such environments, librarians who are able to engage with multiple disciplines are better positioned to support researchers in publishing, citation management, open access dissemination, and visibility enhancement strategies. The implication is that multidisciplinary engagement is not only conceptually desirable but also strategically beneficial for institutional performance.

Aina (2004) highlighted that LIS education in Nigeria has historically focused on technical competencies, which may not fully prepare librarians for the expanding expectations of research engagement and academic collaboration. Accordingly, Ocholla and Ocholla (2011) emphasized the persistent gap between LIS curricula and workplace realities in African institutions. The author explained that librarians who develop interdisciplinary competencies may be better positioned to bridge this gap and enhance their functional relevance within academic institutions. One of the most visible advantages of the multidisciplinary librarian is in scholarly publishing support. Librarians who understand multiple disciplinary conventions are better equipped to assist researchers in identifying appropriate journals, navigating publication standards, managing references, and increasing research visibility. This role indirectly contributes to institutional publication output, which is increasingly tied to academic ranking and funding opportunities. In addition, multidisciplinary librarians are more effective collaborators in research teams, particularly in systematic reviews, data curation, and information synthesis across disciplines.

The relevance of the multidisciplinary librarian appears to lie in their ability to function as both service providers and intellectual partners within the academic ecosystem. Rather than remaining confined to procedural library operations, they occupy a strategic position within knowledge production networks. This shift does not diminish traditional LIS competencies but suggests their extension into broader cognitive and disciplinary engagement. In this way, multidisciplinary librarianship can be understood as an adaptive response to the increasing complexity of academic knowledge systems in Nigeria, where relevance is increasingly determined

by the ability to collaborate, publish, and contribute meaningfully across disciplinary boundaries.

Case for Hybrid Professional Mode (Structured Subject Training)

The argument for structured subject training within LIS education in Nigeria becomes more compelling when viewed against the broader philosophical shift from the custodial librarian to the user-mediator librarian. As library practice increasingly moves away from mere preservation and organization of information toward active mediation between users and knowledge systems, the inherently multidisciplinary character of librarianship becomes more visible. Scholars have long noted that librarianship is not a self-contained discipline but one that derives its effectiveness through continuous interaction with other fields of knowledge. This position is implicit in foundational LIS thought, where interdisciplinarity is treated as an operational necessity rather than an optional enhancement (Aina, 2004; Rubin, 2016).

Within LIS pedagogy itself, interdisciplinarity is already structurally acknowledged. The field routinely draws on psychology to understand user behaviour and information-seeking patterns (Wilson, 1999), sociology to interpret the social dynamics of information access and use (Chatman, 1996), engineering principles to inform library space design and information systems development, and political science to frame policy and governance structures around information institutions. This broad intellectual borrowing reinforces the argument that LIS is inherently relational, functioning through sustained engagement with multiple knowledge systems rather than through isolated disciplinary closure.

This perspective aligns with the argument of Leckie *et al.*, (1996), who emphasized that information seeking is fundamentally a context-driven activity shaped by users' disciplinary environments, professional roles, and situational needs. If user behaviour is deeply embedded in disciplinary contexts, it then follows that effective mediation requires librarians to possess at least foundational familiarity with those contexts. Julien and Duggan (2000) highlighted that effective reference and information services depend not only on technical search skills but also on the librarian's ability to interpret user intent within specific knowledge domains. Accordingly, Hjørland (2002) argued that domain knowledge is central to meaningful information organization and retrieval, suggesting that, without some level of subject understanding, classification and mediation risks become superficial or overly formalistic. This reinforces the idea that librarianship, particularly in academic settings, cannot be fully effective without some engagement with subject-specific epistemologies.

It may, therefore, be suggested that introducing structured subject training through minors, dual-degree arrangements, or certification pathways would provide a

more coherent alignment between LIS theory and professional practice. This suggestion is supported indirectly by studies on academic librarianship roles that show increasing involvement in disciplinary research support, systematic reviews, and scholarly communication activities (Corrall, 2014; Saunders, 2015). These roles require not only technical competence but also interpretive understanding of disciplinary knowledge structures. Aina (2004) observed that LIS education has historically emphasized technical competencies, while Ocholla and Ocholla (2011) highlighted persistent gaps between curriculum design and workplace expectations across African LIS programmes. When these observations are considered alongside the growing interdisciplinary demands of academic libraries, the case for structured subject training becomes less of a radical proposal and more of a logical curricular response.

From this standpoint, structured disciplinary exposure is not intended to dilute LIS identity but to strengthen its functional relevance. If librarians are expected to mediate across knowledge systems effectively, then some degree of formal engagement with those systems becomes necessary. In this sense, the proposal for minor or dual-degree specialization can be understood as an attempt to operationalize what LIS already implicitly assumes.

CONCLUSION

The evidence and arguments advanced in this paper point to a clear and unavoidable position that librarianship in Nigeria can no longer be sustained on a narrowly custodial or purely technical identity without risking diminished relevance in contemporary academic life. The modern academic environment has repositioned the librarian within the centre of knowledge production, where they are expected not only to organize information but to interpret, mediate, and connect disciplinary knowledge systems. In this regard, continuing to produce librarians whose training remains largely detached from subject realities weakens the profession's intellectual authority and limits its functional credibility. A decisive reorientation is, therefore, required, perhaps, one that reclaims the librarian as a genuine knowledge expert rather than a procedural information handler. This reclamation demands structural alignment of LIS education with the interdisciplinary, research-driven, and digitally mediated realities of the 21st-century academy. Anything short of this, risks preserving form while losing substance, where librarians remain visible in institutions but increasingly peripheral to knowledge creation itself.

Based on this, it is recommended that:

1. LIS curricula in Nigeria should be restructured to include formal subject-specialization pathways, such as minors, dual degrees, or certified disciplinary concentrations (e.g., health information, legal information, science

- information), to strengthen contextual understanding of user domains.
2. Library and Information Science programmes should intentionally integrate interdisciplinary course modules, drawing from psychology, sociology, education, ICT, and subject-based methodologies to deepen librarians' capacity for knowledge mediation.
 3. Academic libraries should implement continuous professional development (CPD) programmes focused on disciplinary literacy, enabling practicing librarians to progressively acquire domain knowledge relevant to the faculties they serve.
 4. National LIS accreditation bodies should revise curriculum standards to reflect the realities of modern academic librarianship, ensuring alignment between training outcomes and emerging roles in research support, digital scholarship, and data services.
 5. Universities and LIS training institutions should establish structured partnerships with other academic departments, allowing LIS students to undergo supervised exposure or attachment within specific faculties to build interdisciplinary competence early in their training.

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