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# Graduate Students Internship Experience and Its Impact on Practical Skills Development in LIS Education: A Survey

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study is carried out to identify graduate students internship experience and its impact on practical skills development in LIS Education. A survey design was adopted using a questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting data. The population consists of 120 postgraduate students of Library and Information Science, 30 PG Lecturers/coordinators in charge of internship and 50 Librarians/HOS of universities where internship has been carried out at the postgraduate level in two selected universities - Delta State University, Abraka and University of Calabar in Delta and Cross Rivers State all of South-South Nigeria. Data gathered were analyzed using simple percentages and mean score. The study revealed that the internship experience gets students exposed to modern ICTs used in librarianship which are not found in their current place of work especially working class interns. Also the study revealed poor timing of the internship programme as a problem facing the programme as lectures interfere with interning period. The need for the internship coordinator to involve interns before placement where revealed as a way to correct the discomfort perceived in wrong placement procedure by students. The study recommended that placement of graduate interns be done by the PG coordinator by considering students health status, work/study issues and a suitable participating library not necessarily the PG School library before posting them to embark on the internship.*

**Keywords:** Graduate students, internship, Industrial Training, Practical skills, LIS Education.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The dynamics of knowledge management and the demand for qualitative service delivery in the information-architecture by library employers in recent history has placed a growing demand for library and information science educators to have a service rethink toward closing in the gap that exists between theory and practice in librarianship. With the

changing need of employers and the proliferation of related courses and programmes to librarianship, many changes have taken place in the field of librarianship (Okello-Obura and Kigongo-Bukenya, 2011). These changes have created a conflict of interest between library employers and library educators on best practices. Library employers want to hire librarians who can do the tasks needed by their particular institution, while LIS educators hope to cover theory and leave the training in particular tasks to the future employer (Bird and Crumpton, 2014). Graduate library students are not left out in this. They need to be exposed to the changing trends constantly occurring in librarianship. This onerous task can be achieved through the graduate internship programme.

Graduate students library internship programme otherwise known as industrial training (IT) simply refers to the process of training graduate students to enable them acquire more advanced practical skills in various sections of any given library under the guidance of an experienced supervisor in order to create the link that exists between theory and practice in librarianship. According to Rahman, Kahtun and Mezbah-ul-Islam (2008) an internship is a pre-professional work experience that provides students and recent graduates with the opportunity to gain experience in a particular career field. LIS Internships allow students in the master's and specialist degree programs to work in real world settings, guided by knowledgeable, experienced, and successful supervisors (Chambers, 2015).

Practical skills development is one of the bedrocks of any given profession and it is a sine qua non to the continuous survival and growth of any profession including LIS profession. Practical skills development in Library and Information Science is related to performing high powered tasks in order to master the arts and craft of the diverse areas of librarianship and information science. According to Ochiagha (1995) practical knowledge is learning without which mastery of an area of knowledge may be too difficult to achieve. Practical knowledge involves developing skills through the use of tools or equipment to perform tasks that are related to a field of study (Ugwuanyi and Ezema, 2010). Through the internship programme, graduate students are exposed to their relevant occupational areas in real library work situation. During the programme, graduate students are expected to have good understanding between theory and practice and develop good work habits and make informed choices of the various sections/divisions of the library when given the opportunity in the future. According to Oyedele (1995) that during the training programme the student learn to assume responsibilities, develop the knowledge and attitudes required for successful job performances, cultivate good work habits and explore the fields in which their career

interests lies in other to determine their suitability. The library internship programme is generally skill oriented and requires the graduate students to acquire the required skill in the appropriate library environment. In other to effectively acquire the skills, training must occur in the appropriate environment ([Chambers 2015](#)).

The graduate internship or IT programme is an essential component for the successful completion of the postgraduate programme. According to [Chambers \(2015\)](#) those courses which form the core requirement for the Masters Degree should have been completed by the student at least 18 graduate hours prior to entering an internship leading toward the award of either the MLS or the MIS. She further reiterated that students may be expected to have completed several specific courses relevant to the internship prior to beginning their duties. This is because students during the programme are given the opportunity to analyze and make sound judgement about theory and practice which they have learnt within the four walls of learning. Fallows and Steven (2000) opined that fresh graduate students are immediately required to perform well with sufficient knowledge and background by the employer, hence, by having the industrial training it is one of the options to equip them with such experiences.

The library and information science postgraduate students' internship programme in Nigeria need to be critically re-examined and appraised in the light of its impact on practical skill development in meeting global best practices in LIS Education. The programme is greatly bedevilled in the last two decades especially with the advent and application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the core functions of librarianship and information science. There is often a constant struggle between library employers and the library schools in bridging the gap between theory and actual practice. Most library schools at the postgraduate level in Nigeria lack the necessary learning equipment and facilities that is required for postgraduate students to acquire practical skills in meeting today's world of work while library employers insist on employing graduates that will be conversant with the changing world of work driven by technology. This situation according to [Manley \(2012\)](#) has revived the debate again as there is pressure to degrade the value of the master's degree both by employers hiring paraprofessionals to perform technology related duties and recruiting those with more advanced degrees to be subject specialists in university collections as posited by [Trzeciak, MacLachlan, & Shenker \(2011\)](#). Thus, the need to examine the relevance of the LIS postgraduate internship programme in acquiring practical skills and the challenges it poses to LIS education in general becomes pertinent. Also there is dearth of literature on this

subject most recently in Nigeria. In light of the above, a study of this nature becomes invaluable using the University of Calabar and Delta State University experience.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The graduate library internship is initially designed to resolve the problem of how best to build a closer and more appropriate connection between theory and practice in librarianship. But has the programme actually help the intern, participating library and the library schools in realizing its initial objectives? What benefits do graduate interns derived from participating on the programme in Library and information science, what are the challenges they encountered during the programme and what ways can be adopted to improve on their practical skill development in Library and Information Science education? The current research is motivated to provide answers to the above puzzling questions using the Delta University Library and University of Calabar library experience in Nigeria.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective is to find out the impact of internship experience on postgraduate students in achieving practical skill development in LIS education. Specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the major benefits LIS postgraduate students derived in embarking on the internship programme
2. Find out the problems LIS postgraduate students encountered while carrying out the internship programme
3. Find out ways LIS postgraduate students can improve on achieving practical skill development from the internship programme

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Nse (2012) carried out an evaluation of the students industrial work experience scheme in library schools in Federal Polytechnic Nekede Nigeria. She observed that there seems to exist a wide margin in the reality and actualization of the objectives of the students industrial work experience scheme (SIWES). Nse recommend that for students to be fully equipped with skills/knowledge required for efficiency in the place of work all hands must be on deck. Most graduates including library and information science are not often enthusiastic to face the realities of the world of work until some level of internship or training is provided for them. Fresh graduates of any professional discipline are not ready to work productively

until they receive training (Rahman, Kahtun and Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008). Rahman, Kahtun and Mezbah-ul-Islam (2008) in their study of library education in Bangladesh: Strengths, Problems, and Suggestions, stressed on the need for library schools to make sure that their graduates have practical experience before they accept professional positions. They further opined that public and private sector libraries of all kinds need to appoint fresh graduates as interns and train them for their own sake as well as for the development of the profession.

The relevance of practical training for graduate students in library and information science cannot be over emphasized. It gives graduate students extra exposure to the real world of library work and makes further career choices and provide prospective employers the diverse areas of students' interest within librarianship. According to [Chambers \(2015\)](#), LIS Internships allow students in the master's and specialist degree programs to work in real world settings, guided by experienced supervisors and help them in exploring career options and provide potential employers a valuable perspective on a student's interests. Also the need for graduate internship in librarianship arises because most often, graduates were not exposed to core practicable principles inculcated at workplaces in service delivery. All over the world, educators sometimes face the criticism that their graduates go to the workplaces unable to perform right away ([Okello-Obura and Kigongo-Bukenya, 2011](#)).

Some writers have stressed the relevance of practical training for graduate students due to the changing nature of real world of work caused by the advent of ICTs. Ugwuanyi and Ezeama (2010) posited that with the introduction of ICT into the field of library and information science (LIS), it has become imperative that potential library practitioners possess the skill needed to function effectively in an ICT inclined world of work. And this can be achieved through the industrial training experience. The scheme affords students the opportunity of familiarizing and exposing themselves to the needed experience in handling equipment and machinery that are usually not available in their institution (Nse, 2012). The supervisors play a significant role in graduate students' acquisition of practical skills. It is important for the student's adviser to give guidance and recommendation as to when and where the internship should take place ([Chambers, 2015](#)). She further opined that the supervisor is expected to help judge the adequacy of the student's academic and skill background for the internship. This the supervisor cannot achieve alone without the cooperation of the library school which closes the loopholes inherent in theory and practice. After realizing this loophole, nevertheless, EASLIS in consultation with employers has

designed a number of tailor-made short courses to enable LIS graduates and paraprofessionals to perform at work places (Okello-Obura and Kigongo-Bukenya, 2011).

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

The respondents' perceptions were investigated using descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of 120 postgraduate students of Library and Information Science, 30 PG Lecturers/coordinators in charge of internship and 50 Librarians/HOS (Heads of Sections) of universities where internship has been carried out at the postgraduate level in Delta State University, Abraka and University of Calabar in Delta and Cross Rivers State all of South-Southern Nigeria. The population of study was therefore a total of 200 subjects. The whole population was used for the study because it is small. A structured questionnaire titled: Graduate Students Internship Experience Questionnaire (GSIEQ) developed in line with the research questions and validated by three experts in Library and Information Science was the main instrument used for collecting primary data. The questionnaire contains a set of items based on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA4), Agree (A3), Disagree (D2), and Strongly Disagree (SD1). The questionnaire was given to two experts in library and information science and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation for face validation. The experts were humbly asked to read through and made corrections where necessary. The corrections they made were carefully integrated in the final instrument for data collection. The instrument was directly administered by the researchers to the respondents and collected immediately upon completion. Data gathered was analyzed using mean score to the response items in the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

***Research Question 1: What benefits do LIS postgraduate students benefits from internship programme?***

Table 1: Mean Responses on the benefits of LIS Postgraduate Internship Programme

s/n	It enables graduate internship students to:	Mean Responses				
		X1	X2	X3	AVG	DECN
1	Learn to perform a job under formalized library settings	3.1	2.3	3.2	2.8	Agree
2	Develop desirable work habits and attitudes	2.6	2.9	3.4	3.1	Agree
3	Develop insight into basic requirement in present or future career	2.8	3.1	3.0	2.9	Agree
4	Know the characters of others and their attitude towards work	1.9	1.8	2.3	2.0	Disagree
5	See practically the link that exist between theory/practice	3.4	3.3	2.7	3.2	Agree
6	Learn how to manage work/leisure time more efficiently	2.1	2.6	3.2	2.6	Agree

7	Keep abreast of current trends in librarianship	1.9	1.9	3.1	2.3	Disagree
8	Get exposed to modern ICTs used in librarianship	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5	Agree
9	Make decision about career, spending and family	3.3	3.4	2.4	3.0	Agree
10	Specialize in an area of LIS	3.1	2.6	3.1	2.9	Agree

Key: X1 represent Students, X2 Lecturers and X3 Librarians/HOS

Table 1 indicates that all but two of the items were considered adequate because their average response were up to 2.5 except for items 4 and 7 which was 2.0 and 2.3 depicting a y low rating by the three groups. Closer observation shows that some of the groups still rated low which includes group 2 of item 1, group 1 of item 6 and group 3 of item 9.

**Research Question 2: What are the problems militating against the internship programme of LIS Graduate Students in Delta and Cross Rivers State?**

**Table 2: Mean Responses on the problems militating against postgraduate internship program**

s/n	The problems militating against LIS Graduate Students internship programme are:	Mean Responses				
		X1	X2	X3	AVG	DECN
1	Wrong placement procedure	3.0	1.9	2.5	2.5	Agree
2	Poor supervisory circumstances	2.9	2.1	2.6	2.5	Agree
3	Limitation of the internship to the parent institution's library	3.2	2.4	3.1	2.9	Agree
4	Lack of funds to cater for the welfare of interns	3.2	2.3	3.4	2.9	Agree
5	Poor exposure of interns to practical work	2.5	2.4	1.8	2.2	Disagree
6	Poor working relationship between librarians and interns	2.0	2.2	1.9	2.0	Disagree
7	Truancy during internship by the students	2.3	2.5	2.2	2.3	Disagree
8	Insensitivity of library management to graduate interns problems	2.8	2.7	1.8	2.4	Disagree
9	Variations in learning facilities used in library school from the interning library	2.6	2.1	1.8	2.3	Disagree
10	Lack of willingness on the part of most libraries to accept graduate interns	3.2	2.4	3.0	2.9	Agree
11	Poor timing of the internship programme as lectures interferes with interning period	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.2	Agree
12	Lack of motivation like allowances/stipends for LIS Graduate interns by the interning library/ITF	3.2	2.2	2.9	2.8	Agree

Key: X1 represent Students, X2 Lecturers and X3 Librarians/HOS

Table 2 shows that there was no general agreement by the three groups of the respondents on any particular problem. But a closer observation of the table shows that the responses to items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 which in other words meant inadequate responses. There were high responses for items 3, 4, 10, 11 and 12. Groups 1 and 3 showed a greater response to the problems in items 2 and 3, than groups 2 of items 2 and 3 respectively. However, items 12 indicated a high response to groups 1 and 3 and a low response to group 2. All these agreements in the group responses show that there are many problems facing Graduate Students internship programme that are yet to be solved.

**Research Question 3: What are the ways that can improve the internship programme of Graduate LIS Students?**



**Table 3: Mean Responses on ways to improve postgraduate internship programme**

s/n	Ways that can improve the internship programme of LIS Graduate Students:	Mean Responses				
		X1	X2	X3	AVG	DECN
1	A mandatory law should be made for libraries to accept graduate students for internship	2.6	3.1	2.2	2.6	Agree
2	Placement for LIS Graduate Student internship should be done by the ITF in recognized libraries	2.9	2.1	3.2	2.7	Agree
3	Interning libraries/ITF should be encouraged to pay allowances/stipends to graduate interns	3.5	1.8	2.1	2.5	Agree
4	Interns should be properly supervised daily by librarians/HOS and send report to library school	2.2	3.1	3.4	2.9	Agree
5	Libraries should be compelled to grant interns free access to all their facilities during the internship period	3.2	3.0	2.9	3.0	Agree
6	Poor working habits/truant behaviour by interns should attract disciplinary measure same with staff	2.5	3.4	3.1	3.0	Agree
7	Interns health status should be properly considered before placement	3.0	2.1	3.1	2.7	Agree
8	LIS Graduate internship should not be limited to only Academic libraries of the library school	3.4	1.8	2.7	2.6	Agree
9	Interns should undergo internship experience for at least six weeks of the PG programme duration	2.1	2.2	2.8	2.4	Disagree
10	Library schools should have modern facilities to correct the variation that exist in actual work practice	3.2	2.1	2.7	2.7	Agree

**Key: X1 represent Students, X2 Lecturers and X3 Librarians/HOS**

Table 3 shows that there was not a general agreement by all the groups except for items 5 and 6. Generally out of the ten items in this table, seven of them had a high response. On the other hand, 3 items were not adequate or important because the average responses were very low. All the groups in the 3 items disagreed to the suggested ways of enhancing the graduate internship scheme. However, a further careful observation of the Table indicated a much varied response by the groups. This creates the need for the groups to meet and agree on how to improve the graduate internship programme in libraries/information centres in order to actualize practical skills development in LIS Education.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### ***Benefits LIS Postgraduate Students Derived From Internship Experience***

Based on the findings, it is evident that Library Internship Experience is very relevant to graduate students of LIS because it creates the opportunity for them to practice what they have learnt in the library school. In line with this Anyakoha (1987) stated that industrial training experience provides students the opportunity to practice what they have learnt in the school laboratories. Through internship, the postgraduate students make right decision on areas in librarianship they wish to specialize based on the various sections they experienced internship. The experience also gets students exposed to modern ICTs used in librarianship which are not found in their current place of work especially working class interns.

### ***Problems LIS Postgraduate Students Encountered During the Internship Programme***

One of the major problems of the graduate students' internship scheme is the poor timing of the internship programme as lectures interfere with interning period. All the groups responded positively to this item. Not much can be achieved when interns' attention is divided over training and lecture period. Also, limitation of the internship to the parent institution's library poses another serious challenge to graduate students' internship experience especially those who are gainfully employed without permission for studies. Most of them wish to undergo the exercise in libraries closer to their place of work for proper management of work and study. Lack of funds to cater for the welfare of interns is another major problem confronting graduate internship experience. Interning libraries rarely provide stipends for the interns to cater for at most their transportation to and from place of internship which is capable of causing laxity. Akinyele (2001) opined that lack of fund is capable of bringing laxity amongst industrial trainees students. Olaitan (1992) is also stated that employers should accept students for industrial training and pay them stipends during the exercise.

### ***Ways in improving LIS Students Postgraduate Internship Experience***

Based on the ways of improving the graduate internship programme, there is need for the internship coordinator to involve interns before placement to correct the discomfort perceived in wrong placement procedure by students. This is in line with [Chambers \(2015\)](#) findings that a student may explore the potential for internship placement at a specific site and discuss the possibilities with a potential supervisor and no commitments be made until the internship has been negotiated by the coordinator. Rathburn (1999) observed that proper placement of students for industrial training experience depends largely on the initiative of the industrial coordinator. Truant behaviour and poor working habits can be checkmated through proper supervision and report appropriately to the PG Coordinator at the library school. This supports Mason and Haines (2000) view that students' internship could be supervised on daily basis by experience personnel who is responsible for their practical learning experience.

Giving the same disciplinary measure with staff by interns who put up poor working habits/truant behaviour can as well checkmate incidences of truancy and poor working habits. Akinyele (2001) is also of the opinion that whether part-time or full time industrial trainee students should attract the same disciplinary measure for any offence committed during

training. Also, considering interns' health status before placement is vital to avoiding certain casualties inherent amongst internship period. This is common with pregnant/nursing mothers and asthmatic interns who find it medically impossible to work under such compelling circumstances. Thus, their placement for internship should be on the best possible medical advice. Lastly, providing modern facilities at the library school will correct noticeable variations that exist in facilities used at the library school and the interning library. This is common with the case of classification schemes used. For instance, most library schools uses LC and DDC schemes in teaching students on practical cataloguing and classification while these schemes are no longer applicable for instance, cataloguing and classification of medical library resources which uses the new National Library of Medicine (NLM) scheme. The scheme affords students the opportunity of familiarizing and exposing themselves to the needed experience in handling equipment and machinery that are usually not available in their institutions (Nse, 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the various advantages inherent in internship, the study reveals that LIS graduate students internship programme still faces a lot of challenges such as wrong placement procedures, limitation of the internship to the parent institution's library, poor supervisory circumstances, lack of funds to cater for the welfare of interns, poor timing of the programme as lectures interferes with interning period and variations in learning facilities used in library school from the interning library and others. A few ways were suggested to improve on the programme such as the need for interns' health status to be properly considered before placement, LIS graduate internship should not be limited to only libraries of the PG library school, Interning libraries/ITF should be encouraged to pay allowances/stipends to graduate interns, poor working habits/truant behaviour by interns should attract disciplinary measure same with library staff and others.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. Placement of graduate interns should be done by the PG coordinator by considering students health status, work/study issues and a suitable participating library not necessarily the PG School library before posting them to embark on the internship.

2. Interning libraries should be encouraged to pay graduate interns allowances/stipends to reduce at least their transportation difficulties during the period of internship
3. Truant behaviour and poor working habits by interns' should attract same disciplinary measures with the library staff and such be reported to the PG coordinator at the library school.
4. Library schools should be encouraged to acquire modern facilities such as the latest classification schemes in line with global best practice to correct the variation that exist in actual work practice.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

We take responsibility for the content of this research and state that there is no conflict of interest from the authors.

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