

**FREELANCING: GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION
PROFESSIONALS**

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Abstract

This paper conceptualizes freelancing for librarians and opportunities that abound for library and information professionals to earn more income with the skills they have acquired. It discusses the concept of freelancing, the advantages of freelancing such as earning in multiple currencies, freedom, flexible working hours, self and time management, location flexibility, compensation and earnings control, and improved skill set. It also discusses some of the freelancing opportunities for graduates in library and information science, such as researchers and research assistants, ghostwriting, writing case studies, managing social media handles, writing blogs, digital marketing, copywriting, writing white papers etc. The paper concluded by highlighting strategies such as choosing a niche, defining services & offerings, finding a target audience, determining pricing structure, building your portfolio with past jobs, writing great proposals, building good relationships and trust with clients, and continuous skills improvement to enable librarians to excel in freelancing and benefit from the huge opportunities that abound in freelancing. The paper also made recommendations to inculcate freelancing into library and information science entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: Librarians; Freelancer; Freelancing; Opportunities; Entrepreneurship, Library and Information Science.

Introduction

The problem of unemployment, terrorism, plus further social vices have taken a toll on Nigerian youths. The many numbers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria churn out quite a good number of graduates annually. The government has been unable to meet up with the responsibilities to provide jobs and even many people who are employed are not well paid. This leaves the graduates with no option than to work hard and strive to survive to meet up with their many responsibilities. According to John et al., (2017) Over fifteen thousand (15,000) graduates

from Nigerian universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are produced each year without any assurance of work, which increases the number of young people without jobs in the nation. The situation of the labour market in Nigeria is compelling numerous graduates, including library and information science (LIS) graduates, into unemployment and its repercussions that undermine development (Madu et al, 2016). A lot of graduates have seen the necessity to shun the white-collar jobs in their area of specialization and venture into entrepreneurship as a means to create employment for themselves or a side gig to earn additional income in support of their monthly salaries.

It has been acknowledged that entrepreneurship serves a crucial role in the functioning of organisations and economies (Dickson et al., 2008). It impacts job, creating wealth, reducing poverty, and generating income for both governments and individuals. Perumal and Visalatchi (2020) opine that entrepreneurs are creative people, stringent in their decision-making, potential labour, self-fund raisers, and enthusiastic self-employers. John, et al (2017) refer to entrepreneurship as a means of looking for information to find ways to transform one's social and economic life with substantial income from one's own business. Entrepreneurship, according to Musa and Tsafe (2019), refers to the capacity of an individual to manipulate ideas and turn them into reality. It is an act of finding new skills and developing new ideas to create employment for oneself.

With the harsh realities of unemployment and high graduate turnouts, librarians are obliged to adopt new skills and techniques to evolve, endure, and keep up with competitors in a world of scarcity. Okolo and Oghenetega (2021) posit that library and information science as a

discipline is aimed at producing information professionals that will competently serve various stakeholders for development; therefore, LIS professionals can take up roles other than traditional library jobs. This means that a librarian can work in several other establishments apart from a library and can also do other non-library-related jobs. According to Ugwu and Ezeani (2012) they opined that LIS professionals should work to enhance their overall skills by learning a variety of ICT skills and fostering an entrepreneurial culture and mindset to enable them render quality services, and gain self-employment. LIS graduate should develop technical, managerial, entrepreneurial, information literacy, and information technology skills (Ugwu & Ezeani 2012). With these set skills, librarians could become entrepreneurs and become self-employed and employers themselves.

As much as entrepreneurship is encouraged for librarians, several challenges hinder graduates from setting up their businesses and becoming self-employed. Okolo and Oghenetega (2021) also outlined issues of recession, policies of government, the anxiety of rivalry and disappointment, absence of entrepreneurship drive, the challenge of coming up with persuasive business concepts, lack of sources of funds, and the negative attitude of LIS professionals among these challenges. Nuhu et al., (2021) stated that the global economic meltdown and economic recessions in most countries including Nigeria, the challenges of unemployment and poverty are among the challenges being faced by graduates of tertiary institutions and professions. This is why it has become imperative for librarians to look at the possibilities that abound in freelancing and key into them for employment. Freelancing is not capital-intensive. The vast majority of freelancers begin with a bank account reserve and the personal equipment they require: a

computer, a phone, a car, and a home office. Vlach (2022) added that the capital required for freelancing includes expertise, qualifications, skills and know-how, education, tests, and certifications, time, practice, experience, strengths, contacts, references, and reputation. The general objective of this paper is to examine the opportunities that exist in freelancing for self-employment for library and information science professionals.

The specific objectives of the paper are to define the concept of freelancing; highlight the advantages of freelancing; examine freelancing opportunities for librarians; examine the strategies for excelling in freelancing as a librarian, and make appropriate recommendations.

Concept of Freelancing

Freelancing is a contract-based profession in which a person uses their skills and experiences to serve multiple clients. A freelancer according to Okolo and Oghenetega (2021) is an independent person that offers their service where required and is not attached to any single establishment as an employer. A freelancer uses skills, education, and experience to work with several clients, and can take on various assignments without committing to a single employer. The number of tasks or gigs that a freelancer can take boils down to his/her ability to deliver on the tasks. A freelancer can work from home or any other location that is convenient for him/her. Wood et al., (2018) define a freelancer as a person who is not employed permanently by a specific employer in the long term.

In recent years, freelancing has become more popular and more people are embracing that line of work. Appealing perks like freedom and flexibility contribute to the freelancing

sector's growth. Cope (2021) noted that more than one-third of the U.S. workforce is currently freelancing in one form or another. People are no longer freelancing out of necessity, but out of choice. This is not surprising when one considers the benefits and freedom of working according to one's convenience. Librarians with the right skills can key into this trend and earn even much more than people who have regular employment.

Freelancing has many advantages. Companies and even individuals are increasingly looking for professionals to complete temporary jobs for them, and the internet has made this more accessible than ever. Freelancing offers several opportunities and many perks that keep attracting people to the line of work.

As a freelancer, one runs one's business, and it is the individual's decision on which new clients to take on, the working hours, and the hourly rate that one wishes to charge. Salem (2021) asserted that freelancers experience more freedom concerning their work schedule, and are not led by another individual. The ability to set one's hours and yet earn good money can be particularly attractive. Salem (2021) confirmed that freelancers have flexible schedules and choose for themselves when to work. The freelancer is you're his/he own boss, so, the workload, schedule, and every other aspect of how one run things are entirely one's choice to make. A freelancer may be able to choose to live anywhere and even travel while working. Akhmetshin (2018) have shown that a freelancer can work for any organization in the world, irrespective of location. Since most freelance work is done digitally, a freelancer can be fully remote with clients worldwide and live and travel wherever, while still completing assigned tasks. Kazi (2014) supported this by stating that freelancers are not required to travel to a specific location to

work and can work from home or any other location they choose. As a freelancer, one has to be conversant with the world clock. That will help with deadlines and timelines despite the location of the client one is working for.

Also, freelancing allows one to keep expanding one's network and be among a larger group of people who can recommend one for more jobs. Salem (2021) reported that clients can recommend an individual to others, which also in turn, increases the freelancer's network. As freelancer keeps working, his/her skills improves and he/she gets more job recommendations, thereby increasing one's reputation, network, and skills. Akhmetshin, et al (2018) opine that freelancing improves one's skills. It provides many more opportunities for growth as the individual tackle a variety of projects. Salem (2021) also notes that there is self-development in freelancing, as the individual earns and learns at the same time.

Given that the freelance has the power to control his/her earnings there is no need to ask the boss for a raise because he/she sets the rates and also choose how much work to take on. Rates and amount of work are subject to market forces and there are usually precedents that guide freelancers on how they can set their pricing according to their skills and experiences. For instance, Cope (2021) reported that, while a freelance writer, on average, has a rate between \$30-40/hr, with an annual salary of around \$42,000; a graphic designer's hourly rate is about \$40-45, with an annual salary of around \$90,000; while a data analyst can average \$55-65/hr, with a yearly salary of \$100,000. However, many freelancers find that they can raise their rates over time, as they do more work, progress in their field, and gain good experiences.

In freelancing, one can also negotiate how he/she want his/her pay or accepts only gigs that match his/her desired payment schedules. The individual can choose to take on gigs that pay hourly, per project, or monthly, or even have the three schedules running concurrently depending on the terms of the contract. That is why Salem (2021) opined that a freelancer is responsible for his/her salary.

Freelancing Opportunities for Librarians

Librarians are occupied with series of activities emanating from several opportunities and freelance service is one of such numerous opportunities. John, et al (2017) defines a freelance librarian as "a trained library and information scientist who is self-employed and works as an independent contractor that markets, sells and provides information services using available resources." Ogbo et al. (2022) describe a freelance librarian as similar to every other businessman who seeks an opportunity and exploits it. The library professional training equips graduates with the abilities and skills to work in several fields that are not exactly in a traditional library setting. Adomi (2009) supported this by stating that career opportunities for librarians are endless. Freelance librarians can consult, teach both online and offline, research, edit, index, run workshops, adjunct at universities, write content, design for the web, optimize websites for search engines, as well as analyze data, and so much more (Rodriguez, 2016). Opportunities do abound depending on one's skills, style, location, and initiative. Some not-very popular, but highly rewarding freelancing niches that librarians can engage in are:

1. Book writing (ghostwriting)

Book writing can fall under different styles of writing. As a ghostwriter, an individual will generally write long-form content that could be descriptive or narrative in nature when writing fiction or expository when writing nonfiction. One of the main features of this type of freelancing is that the name of the ghostwriter is usually not attached to the work. The terms and conditions may vary depending on the agreement, but most ghostwriters sign non-disclosure agreements and are not entitled to royalties from any subsequent sales of the work they have written. The copyright is also retained by the client, but Cope (2021) said that the agreement can state otherwise. Also, the ghostwriter, most times, cannot use the material in building their portfolio.

Ghostwriters may specialize in fiction or non-fiction and may also work across the board when offering their book-writing services. Long non-fiction writing projects typically command a higher rate than fiction. Ghostwriters can earn anywhere from \$4to \$40per page (Cope, 2021).

2. Freelance Researcher/ Research Assistant

As a freelance researcher, one's responsibilities are to conduct research on a specific subject or topic, report to a project manager, other researchers, or directly to one's client about the findings, and help organize the research so that other researchers can easily access them and utilize the resources. A freelance researcher can work in many industries, including marketing and advertising, entertainment, higher education, and nonprofit and governmental organizations, and the specific duties may vary depending upon the industry. A librarian can also be hired as a virtual research assistant who will only be required to gather data or do a literature search and send it to the main researcher.

As a Librarian, Nelson (2022) opined that one can easily translate one's knowledge of online databases, library collections, and research skills into a freelance business assisting people in performing research on various subjects. Being an expert in one particular subject area like governance, medicine, or law, makes it even better to land clients who need such research services

3. Writing Case Studies and White Papers

Writing case studies is another profitable type of writing that is in high demand and can be undertaken by librarians. Case studies are in-depth examinations of a particular subject or situation. They are often used by businesses to highlight the effectiveness of their products and services and to outline the positive impact the products may have on their customers. A case study freelancer can average around \$2000 per case study, (Cope, 2021).

A case study serves a purpose similar to a white paper, where the main intent is to present the details of a problem and describe an approach to solving it. However, there are some key differences between the two. Case studies tend to be shorter, more descriptive, and less technical than white papers. White paper writers are frequently asked to write on specialized topics such as healthcare, technology, and finance, and they must communicate effectively with subject matter experts and other stakeholders. It is a highly competitive niche that requires a high expertise and professionalism, still the rewards can be substantial for those who excel, with high rates and the potential for repeat business and referrals.

4. Social Media Marketing.

Social media has become a part of daily life and a crucial part of many businesses' marketing strategies, making it a good niche for freelancers today. With the growth of popular platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok, businesses have found an avenue for showcasing engaging and persuasive content that can help them reach a wider audience and build a stronger online presence for their brands. Librarians can leverage this, as there is a high demand for freelancers who specialize in creating effective social media content that resonates with users and achieve specific marketing goals.

5. Copywriting

In this information and communications technology age, there is a high demand for copywriting services because nearly all businesses have a web presence. Businesses of all sizes need engaging content to promote their products and services online. For this, Sinicki (2019) asserted the need to know the basics of SEO and how to get the client to the top of the search engine results pages (SERP). A copywriter writes persuasive content, while still maintaining the tone and style of the brand or business they represent. Being a copywriter is a highly rewarding niche, and the potential for repeat business is excellent, making it an ideal option for freelance librarians.

Specializing in landing pages or sales pages is quite lucrative. The two are similar in that they both leverage persuasive writing techniques and are designed to convert traffic. These two pages are generally not part of a website's main navigation page. The main difference between the two is that landing pages are focused on generating leads, whereas sales pages aim at

converting customers quickly and driving sales. Depending on the level of experience, landing page and sales page writers can charge from \$450 to \$1000 per page (Cope, 2021).

6. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a highly popular niche that many freelancers have dabbled in at one point or another. This term refers to a wide range of marketing strategies that leverage multiple online channels to reach a network of customers and drive sales for the brand. Cope (2021) opined that digital marketing freelancers usually charge \$15-\$45 per hour. A freelancer who decides to specialize in this area can choose to narrow the focus down to specific types of content. The main options include newsletters, SEO writing, video scripts, tutorials, how-to guides, etc.

7. Education and Instructional Design

People are increasingly acquiring training and certifications online, so demand for instructors is on the rise among training companies. Librarians have a natural affinity for education and instructional design. The education career opportunities for librarians are nearly limitless, with librarians at the forefront of education, and its subfields. Examples of such include delivering webinars and e-learning classes. Platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Skype can be used to deliver such educational services.

Strategies to Excel in Freelancing as a Librarian

Freelancing can be rewarding and bring in big paychecks if the right decisions are made and followed through. Whatever aspect one decides to venture into as a librarian freelancer, certain strategies enable one to succeed.

- **Choose a Niche**

A niche is a concept that describes a specialized area of a broader market that allows freelancers to differentiate themselves and their service offerings from their competition. It is important to decide on which kind of jobs a freelancer wants to take on based on skills and experiences. This will help the individual to master the particular area and be good at it instead of venturing into every area and not acquiring any expertise in the long run. Bills (2021) opined having a niche can make marketing easier by knowing the target market and tailoring marketing message to the target market's needs and interests. The niche should be something one is excited about, know well, and can do exceptionally well. It might not come out well at the first attempt, but one can test and make adjustments as one goes on, but this should be done strategically, and given more time before one start seeing results before one decides to make changes. One can increase one's rates by specializing in one industry and growing into a recognized authority in one's field, (Okpala, 2022). Okpala (2022) maintained that a customer seeking a copywriter in the banking industry will be considerably more drawn to a profile from a specialist than from a generalist, and will be willing to pay more for that specialized service. Choosing the right freelancing niche can lead to more clients, bigger projects and bigger paychecks.

- **Define Service & Offering**

The desire to turn one's skills into a service is the first step to becoming a freelancer. To do this, one needs to understand how one's skills can help a prospective client. Service and offerings should be specific, (Sinicki, 2019) It is essential to recognize that clients are looking for solutions to their problems and how one can deliver services that can resolve them. To be a successful freelancer, one needs to understand the client's situation and use one's service to address their issue. The answer to these questions will form the basis on which one packages one's skills as a service and come up with a brief description of the services one offers that can help one to sell one's freelance service to companies and individuals. Bills (2021) said that it is essential to decide what you want to do and what you would not do. Concisely explain what you can do, how you do it, and for what type of business or client.

- **Find the Target Audience**

Offering freelance services requires the need to find a target audience. Identify the type of clients that will be a good fit for the services one intends to offer. As a new freelancer, Cope (2021) opined that merely being great at what one does is not enough to automatically have clients seeking one out. It is therefore, crucial to position oneself in front of prospective clients so they can learn about one's services. One will need to take an active role in finding potential clients. For most freelancers, there are three ways to acquire clients:

- Freelance job posting platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork and Freelancer.com
- Leverage existing connections and networking
- Marketing, advertising, and outreach

Understanding which of these options works best for one is a good way to find relevant clients that will require one's services.

- **Develop a Pricing Structure**

If the services to be offered are clearly defined and the target market ascertained, setting the pricing for the services will follow. The goal is to ensure that the paycheck is commensurate to the job without losing potential clients. The best bet is to study the market and observe what other service providers are charging for similar freelancing services. There is no perfect formula for pricing freelancer services, as many variables such as experience, industry, project duration, deliverables, project complexity, client's geographic location, and urgency can determine how much clients are willing to pay for their services.

Pricing should not hinder starting one's freelancing journey, as one's rate are not permanent. One can change them in the future. Start with a price that is affordable. The rates can be changed and improved with time as research, according to Gandini et al (2016) and Leung, (2014) has shown that increased reputation scores correlate with higher earnings for Freelancers.

- **Create a Portfolio with Past Jobs**

Creating a good portfolio of past jobs executed is an important step to becoming a successful freelancer. As a freelancer, one's portfolio establishes the quality of one's work by

showcasing one's accomplishments and successful past projects. It provides an opportunity to show prospective clients what one is capable of and the value of one's expertise. Blyth, et al (2022) describe this showcasing of skill as a self-branding strategy. One's portfolio should highlight one's best work related to the service one offers. Each item in one's portfolio should clearly depict one's contributions and how clients benefit from one's work. Some of the things that a compelling portfolio could include are data-driven results, images, charts and work samples. These help to boost one's profile, improve one's brand, and increase one's visibility. Furthermore, Blyth, et al (2022) reported that freelancers are always looking for ways to distinguish themselves by increasing the quality of their profiles. Note that it is essential to receive permission from one's past clients before incorporating their project materials into one's portfolio.

- **Write Great Proposals**

To guarantee a successful off-take as a freelancer, the first project being taken should closely match existing work experiences and capabilities. When one finds a project that one can successfully execute, one should submit a proposal. Submitting the right proposal can determine whether securing a job is possible. It is crucial to have a proposal that works for you. A proper proposal should be a strong selling point for one's abilities and therefore, needs to be outlined based on the understanding of the client's needs, how one can help, and provide your credentials and qualifications. In accordance with Sinicki (2019) it is important to keep these brief and concise, demonstrate as someone that have correctly read and comprehended the task, and include a sample link. One could create a template to help organize the proposals, but the most

successful freelancers tailor their proposals to match the specific client and projects on ground. Putting in that extra up-front time and effort shows sincerity, enthusiasm, and professionalism.

Finally, remaining professional and friendly is key, use professional language to help the proposal stand out from the numerous proposals from other freelancers in the same market.

- **Building Networks and Maintaining Good Relationships with Clients**

There is a saying that one's network often, determines their net worth. Building a network is important, but it is more important to build a professional network. Networking sites such as linkedIn, twitter, instagram and facebook are often great places to build such networks. More clients and good referrals often stem from such networks. It is also imperative that a freelancer contribute positively to the job of the people in the network, when need be, as such a community proves to be of immense help in the line of the job.

Another way to excel in freelancing is to create and build good relationships with one's clients. The clients are the bedrock of the business in freelancing. Okpala (2022) said that this is best achieved through regular communication. Building a long-term good working relationship can lead to repeat business and new client referrals. Blyth, et al (2022) affirmed that some freelancers contact clients after completing a job to ensure that they were rated. Some stated that they would periodically remind clients, with whom they had a positive experience, to leave them a review to build their profile and increase their reputation.

- **Continuing Development of Skills**

Freelancers are hired as a result of their skills that enable them to offer excellent services to their clients. Consequently, it is imperative for freelancers to consistently improve their skills, adapt to changes, and expand their knowledge about the services they offer. Keeping up with current trends is also important as it helps to keep abreast of current methods and tools that are essential in providing clients with the highest service level. Online learning resources such as Udemy, Simplilearn, Alison, LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, and even youtube are great starting points for ensuring that one's skills are always up to date. Okpala (2022) opines that combining work experiences, research, and learning from experts in the same industry opens up more opportunities for professional growth. Acquiring relevant training and skills is essential to boosting one's abilities.

Recommendations.

1. The LIS training courses that dwell on entrepreneurship should incorporate freelancing as an option for librarians to be employed. This will help to expose the LIS students to the huge opportunities and variety of platforms that are available for them to explore and earn a decent living after graduation.
2. Librarians should be intentional about building their professional network both online and offline. This is especially important now that so many recruiters use the option of LinkedIn to recruit and offer both permanent and freelancing job opportunities.
3. LIS professionals should always strive to improve their horizons. This will equip them with the necessary skills to explore the great options available in the freelance market

Conclusion

Technological advancement has given the LIS profession a lift such that a librarian is no longer confined to the library or the library environment. ICT has enhanced the abilities of the librarian to explore other options and leverage their numerous skills to earn a decent living as Freelancers. Unemployment is still on the rise while tertiary institutions keep graduating students in high numbers every year. It has, therefore, become imperative for librarians to look beyond entrepreneurship options that are related to librarianship and explore other options that the profession gives one the ability to fit in and work. The paper has thoroughly examined the concept of freelancing within the context of library and information science. It has provided a comprehensive understanding of freelancing as a self-employment option for librarians and explored its various aspects and implications. By comprehensively examining the concept of freelancing, the paper has equipped librarians with the knowledge, insights, and practical guidance necessary to navigate the freelancing landscape successfully. Furthermore, it has aimed to empower librarians to embrace freelancing as a viable and fulfilling career path, enabling them to thrive in their professional pursuits and contribute their expertise to various clients and industries.

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