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## **Wikimedia in the classroom: New learning skills for strategized library and information science training**

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### **Abstract:**

*The information society has become sophisticated that it requires regular professional updates on new skills and learning to navigate the roles of service delivery. One of the skills that define the LIS educators in imparting the career-ready students for the services ahead is the Wikimedia digital literacy skill. This is because Wikipedia has the capacity for faculty and community participation, information and digital literacies, inputting language skills, preservation of oral history and cultural heritage. Therefore, this paper highlighted the new learning and skills of Wikimedia, level of the awareness of using Wikimedia and the lessons learned after the facilitation of Wikimedia. This was a qualitative study. The participants comprised 22 LIS professionals of members of the Nigerian Library Association, Anambra State Chapter during the African Library Week #ILib1Ref campaign. The study was carried out at Professor Kenneth Dike Central e-Library Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The instruments used were facilitation and discussion group. It was discovered that over 70% of the participants were not aware of the roles of Wikimedia. However, they signed up and gained new knowledge of information and digital skills while using Wikimedia which enabled them to participate in the African Library Week of #ILib1Ref and contribute to improving articles with authentic and accurate sources to Wikimedia. The study recommended that librarians should collaborate and connect with other Wikipedia user groups to attract grants and expertise for enhanced capacity building.*

**Keywords:** library and information, LIS educators, librarians, Wikipedia, Wikimedia in the classroom

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## **Introduction**

Learning starts from the classroom and moves to the libraries and personal information services. The learning and training in the library schools aim to inspire and enable connection to new skills. This is where the concept of Wikimedia in the classroom comes in to build a world where knowledge is brought forth with information accessible to the community-driven by participation in sharing authentic sources. Arguably, Wikimedia enhances and supports access to information (IFLA, 2016). It has massive content on education and literacy, health information, science and technology as well as covers all subjects with open access and open education resources. This makes Wikimedia an attractive place to search for varieties of information. It is a resources for librarians all over the globe to achieve great things that can nurture career-ready students.

Importantly, Wikimedia is basically about people. It relates to the language of library and information science which revolves around people. If LIS educators truly believe in information needs and satisfaction of all groups with genuine information, then integrating Wikipedia in the classroom will strengthen the media and literacy skills in librarianship. This can be achieved with the many faces and projects of Wikimedia which include WikiLibrary, Wikidata, WikiCommons, Wikipedia, Wikisource, Wikiversity and Wiktionary among others. Wikipedia applies technology that can be used in several ways as learning approaches in the classroom like editing articles, improving articles, adding pictures of cultural heritage, adding authentic and accurate sources, translating articles from foreign to local languages, learning information, media and digital literacies as well as guides for plagiarism (Osuchukwu, Godwin, Ikenna, Ebijuwu and Olabisi, 2022).

Today, there are many groups and hubs in Wikimedia that carry out research to contribute to the body of knowledge. For instance, The Black Wikipedians form one of the groups that contribute content on social presence and quality information among others (Stewart & Ju, 2020). The GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum) Wikimedia user group sets the spaces for cultural heritage resources, indigenous knowledge, local languages, archives and community inclusion in building local content. These are hinged on courses taught in the library schools. Ideally, this strategy and significant of Wikimedia projects inspire more librarians and educators to become involved with the Wikimedia Movement. Now, if a group can organize itself to contribute to knowledge to the biggest online encyclopedia, LIS cannot be neutral and watch as observers in a world where they ought to have the biggest stake in information content delivery. However, there are still issues of awareness of Wikimedia is and the discourse on whether Wikimedia should be accepted and used in academic research or not. This paper looked at the new learning and the new skills for strategized LIS training using Wikimedia in the classroom

## **Wikipedia**

Interestingly, The Wikipedia Library (TWL) was created by Wikipedia Foundations to focus on improving Wikimedia's role in the research ecosystem). Now, if the library and information science has nothing to offer to the biggest online encyclopedia, then there would not have been any reason to include The WikiLibrary in its platform. In other words, library schools, libraries and librarians have something to offer that earned them that recognition and space in Wikimedia. The point is that LIS professionals have noted the values Wikimedia adds in the classroom that they are now integrating into their curriculum just as some librarians have listed it as parts of their services for effective service delivery. This is shown in many collaborations that have taken place between Wikipedia and the Libraries/Faculties.

There was a collaboration between the library-faculty team from the American University of Central Asia in using Wikipedia as a tool to increase collaborative learning and civic participation of students in sociology courses ((Bekbalaeva, Tumenbaeva & Askhatbekova, 2021). In the same vein, an

investigation of faculty members of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) Barcelona (Spain) was carried out to uncover the perceptions of, attitudes, and real usage of an open collaborative environment such as Wikipedia. Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) was also studied. They discovered that lecturers that signed up for Wikipedia likely used it for educational purposes in their teaching activities, edit articles in the free encyclopedia, design teaching materials and academic consultation among others (Lladós-Masllorens, Aibar, Meseguer-Artola, Minguillón & Llerga Felip, 2017).

It clearly shows that Wikipedia is a learning tool that can be integrated into the classroom and the library services of digital literacy. Significantly, librarians welcome wikipedia as it is an open resource that advocated for wider sharing of knowledge. In 2021, Wikipedia celebrated 21st anniversary. All over the world, the libraries, library associations, institutions of learning and other information-sharing organizations aligned with the Wikimedia anniversary, emphasizing their support in learning and information sharing. This has the prospect of making the faculty interested in using wikipedia in teaching and research.

### **Awareness of Wikimedia projects and activities**

However, many people are still unaware of Wikimedia and its activities. For instance, a research by McCune (2017) in Nigeria disclosed that there was a low awareness of Wikimedia that even some professionals have not heard of Wikipedia. Perhaps this can be traced to the unpopular perception of Wikimedia in the academic sector where its articles are viewed as unreliable. Probably, those against Wikipedia have not come close to studying the articles nor verified their claims against the authentic and accurate sources therein. It must be noted that Wikimedia is against plagiarism and has volunteers who regularly monitor every source and delete anything that is against the rule of scholarly writing. Wikipedia indeed has different tasks, goals and skills for any group, individual, any day and anytime. The indication is that Wikipedia can make information science more relevant through the digital literacies it offers and the accurate sources it displays. Acquiring the skill and the knowledge must start in the classroom. It must start from the educators who are teachers, enablers, connectors, mentors and networkers in information generation. The library school is the place to learn, be empowered, gain knowledge and exercise the power of sharing. The LIS students do not have to wait to graduate before they learn the basics of things they should know before hitting the labour market. That is the principle of the 5th law of library – the library is a growing organism. One of these growing organisms is Wikimedia.

### **Challenges of Wikipedia as an information source**

Wikimedia is not fully accepted in the academic circle because it is viewed as an unreliable and unauthentic source. The reason may be pointed at the open model of anyone can edit its contents (Bridges, Pun & Arteaga, 2021). But that assertion is changing as awareness is being created of the real value of Wikimedia and its mechanisms of checking unreliable sources.

### **Objectives of the study**

This paper:

1. Highlighted the new learning skills of Wikimedia by LIS professionals
2. Determined the level of awareness of using Wikimedia and
3. Analyzed the lessons learned after the facilitation of Wikimedia

### **Methodology**

This was a qualitative study. It used the physical Wikimedia facilitation organized for the members of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) Anambra State Chapter during the African Library Week #1Lib1Ref campaign. 22 LIS professionals including LIS educators participated in the training at Professor Kenneth Dike State Central e-Library Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. It also used focus group

discussions to collect data from the participants. The study was analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies.

## Findings

It was discovered that 70% of the participants were not aware of the roles of Wikimedia in information service. 90% were not aware of the WikiLibrary. However, they signed up and gained new knowledge and skills in digital contributions to Wikimedia. The lessons learned were that the knowledge gained enabled their participation in the African Library Week of #1Lib1Ref. Their contributions added to the improved articles as well as built the authentic and accurate sources on Wikimedia. Again, they joined the Wikimedia User Groups and Library Wiki hubs for more capacity building. They now facilitate Wikimedia use in the Faculties and libraries. The LIS students are also showing interests.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Wikipedia is gaining popularity among faculties and institutions of learning in Nigeria. It is a good thing that librarians are coming close to learning and contributing authentic sources as stakeholders in information services. The study recommended that LIS educators and other librarians should collaborate and connect with Wikipedia user groups to attract grants and expertise for enhanced capacity building.

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