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# Invisible Labour and Silent Burnout: Validating the LIS Identity Strain Scale (LISIS) as an Indicator of Occupational Mental Health among Nigerian Academic Librarians

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**Keywords**: LIS Identity Strain Scale (LISIS); invisible labour; burnout; academic librarians; psychometric validation; Nigeria

**Abstract:** Invisible labour and silent burnout remain persistent but poorly measured sources of psychological strain in academic librarianship, particularly in under-resourced institutions.

This study develops and validates the Library and Information Science Identity Strain Scale (LISIS), a twelve-item instrument designed to measure identity-based occupational strain among academic librarians. A mixed-methods design was used, with survey data from fifty early-career librarians in three Nigerian universities and semi-structured interviews with ten of them. Occupational mental health is indexed throughout by two established measures, emotional exhaustion on the Maslach Burnout Inventory and satisfaction on the Job Satisfaction Survey. No clinical construct is measured or implied. The LISIS returned an overall internal consistency of .825, with subscale values between .79 and .86, and exploratory factor analysis returned the four dimensions on which it was built, although on a sample of fifty that solution is better read as provisional. Identity strain, and in particular role invisibility and recognition deficit, were strongly associated with emotional exhaustion ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) and inversely associated with job satisfaction ($r = -.55$, $p < .01$), with the four dimensions together accounting for 51 per cent of the variance in emotional exhaustion. All five null hypotheses were rejected. The evidence reported here is preliminary and awaits confirmatory testing, but it establishes the LISIS as a workable diagnostic instrument for a professional group that has remained largely absent from occupational health scholarship.

**Data availability**: The dataset is not available for redistribution or reanalysis.

## Introduction

The psychological wellbeing of academic librarians has attracted far less attention in Library and Information Science than the profession's technologies, its services and its information behaviour. Where the affective side of the work appears at all, it tends to appear as an aside rather than as a subject in its own right. The neglect is sharpest in resource-constrained systems such as the Nigerian university sector, where librarians work under conditions of systemic undervaluation, unclear role boundaries and a considerable quantity of labour that nobody records. Emotional exhaustion and professional disengagement are common in those conditions, and they usually go unremarked.

A body of recent work has begun to take the emotional labour of library work seriously, together with the cost of sustained multitasking, ethical tension and institutional neglect. What that work has not yet produced is a means of measuring the identity-based stressors that sit underneath. Professional identity strain, as it is understood here, is the dissonance between how a librarian regards her own professional worth and the recognition her institution actually extends. Where intellectually demanding work is expected without visibility or support to match, the strain shows up as burnout, as reduced job satisfaction and as a weaker sense of belonging. This can be connected to mental health.

Mental health follows the World Health Organization (2022), which describes it as a state of wellbeing in which a person can realise their own abilities, cope with the ordinary stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community, rather than the narrower clinical sense of diagnosable illness. Wellbeing draws on Diener's (1984) concept of subjective wellbeing, comprising a cognitive appraisal of one's circumstances and an affective component, applied here to

the occupational domain rather than to life as a whole. Job satisfaction follows Locke (1976, p. 1304) as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Occupational stress is understood through the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) as the strain arising when workplace demands outstrip the resources available to meet them, amplifying invisible labour syndrome.

Invisible labour refers to work that is performed but neither seen nor credited by the institution (Daniels, 1987; Star & Strauss, 1999). It names the phenomenon this study addresses. Identity strain, measured by the LISIS, is the psychological construct through which that phenomenon is quantified. Emotional labour, in Hochschild's (1983) sense, is one mechanism by which strain becomes exhaustion, not the object of measurement here. Invisible labour, identity strain and emotional labour are kept distinct throughout the study. The LISIS measures identity strain as a condition that accounts for exhaustion.

Two points of scope follow from these definitions and should be stated plainly. First, occupational mental health is indexed in this study by two measured indicators only, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, and the claims made are confined to those indicators. Second, no clinical diagnosis of any participant is implied, sought, or possible on this design. The study belongs to a growing literature that takes the working lives of LIS professionals in the Global South as its starting point, questions assumptions drawn from Western and better-resourced institutions, and argues for accounts of wellbeing grounded in local conditions.

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To develop the LISIS as a context-sensitive instrument for academic librarianship.
2. To validate the psychometric properties of the LISIS in terms of content validity, internal consistency and dimensional structure.
3. To determine the level and dispersion of identity strain across its four dimensions, namely role invisibility, value misalignment, recognition deficit and belonging ambiguity, among academic librarians in Nigerian universities.
4. To examine the relationship between identity strain and the two indicators of occupational mental health adopted here, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction.
5. To evaluate the predictive validity of the LISIS for these indicators in resource-constrained academic library environments.

## Research Questions

1. What steps are required to develop the LISIS as a context-sensitive instrument for academic librarianship?

2. What are the psychometric properties of the LISIS in terms of content validity, internal consistency and dimensional structure?
3. What is the level and dispersion of identity strain across the four dimensions among academic librarians in Nigerian universities?
4. What is the relationship among identity strain and emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction?
5. To what extent does the LISIS predict these indicators in resource-constrained academic library environments?

## Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Hypotheses one to four are stated against emotional exhaustion, which is the outcome variable modelled at dimension level in this study; the fifth addresses both indicators at composite level.

$H_{01}$: Role invisibility does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion among academic librarians in Nigerian universities.

$H_{02}$: Value misalignment does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion among academic librarians in Nigerian universities.

$H_{03}$: Recognition deficit does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion among academic librarians in Nigerian universities.

$H_{04}$: Belonging ambiguity does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion among academic librarians in Nigerian universities.

$H_{05}$: The LISIS does not significantly predict occupational mental health outcomes, indexed here by emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction.

## Conceptual Framework

The central construct is LIS Identity Strain, measured by the LISIS across four subdimensions: role invisibility, value misalignment, recognition deficit and belonging ambiguity. This composite construct is modelled as a predictor of two outcome variables, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The framework is anchored on Social Identity Theory, Emotional Labour Theory and the Job Demands-Resources model, each of which is discussed in the theoretical framework below.

## Review of Relevant Literature

The psychological wellbeing of LIS professionals has historically received limited attention within scholarly discourse, despite mounting evidence that emotional strain, cognitive overload and professional invisibility are endemic to the field (Parme, 2023). Where LIS research has concentrated on technical competencies, service delivery and information behaviour, the affective dimensions of librarianship have remained under-theorised. The gap is widest in resource-constrained environments,

where institutional neglect and role ambiguity add to the emotional demands already placed on staff.

## Emotional labour in library work

Hochschild's (1983) account of emotional labour offers one of the more durable explanations for the emotional cost of library work. The idea has been studied at length in nursing, teaching and hospitality, but its application within LIS has been slow to follow (Buschman, 2024). Academic librarians absorb a good deal of emotional weight quietly, reassuring anxious students and managing tension with faculty while institutions expect a professional neutrality that leaves little room to admit strain. DeLooper (2024) argues that this regulation is institutional as much as personal, built into expectations of helpfulness and detachment that librarians are rarely permitted to set aside. Lampert and Hornung (2025) found in a longitudinal study of human service professionals that surface acting in particular predicts emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation.

## Professional identity strain

Identity strain refers to the psychological tension that arises when professionals experience a misalignment between their self-concept and the expectations or recognition afforded by their institution (Chen et al., 2023). Wood et al. (2020) note that academic librarians frequently face shifting expectations without corresponding recognition, which produces identity confusion and emotional fatigue. Neville (2024) shows how belonging within an academic setting is negotiated rather than granted, and how those who are read as peripheral come to doubt their own legitimacy. Unver (2026) describes the same pattern in the public sector as an invisible load, where intellectual labour is absorbed without reward. In Nigerian academic libraries, anecdotal evidence suggests that librarians often feel invisible within research ecosystems despite playing critical roles in data stewardship, scholarly communication and research support. Nwofor et al. (2024) report that mentoring structures in federal university libraries in the South East are thin and inconsistently applied, which leaves early-career staff to work out their professional standing without guidance.

Few studies have attempted to measure identity strain in LIS contexts. Existing research tends to treat it descriptively, focusing on symptoms such as burnout and disengagement without examining underlying mechanisms. The LISIS responds to this gap by offering a structured instrument to assess identity-related stress across four dimensions: role invisibility, value misalignment, recognition deficit and belonging ambiguity.

## Burnout and occupational demand

Burnout, as conceptualised by Maslach and Jackson (1981), comprises emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. It is a chronic response to prolonged occupational stress and is particularly prevalent in service professions (Jacobs, 2024). In LIS it is often linked to role ambiguity, lack of recognition and emotional strain. Parme (2023) reported high levels of burnout among LIS professionals, worsened by institutional neglect and cognitive overload. Stanfield (2025) found burnout among academic librarians in the south-eastern United States tied to high cognitive demand and limited autonomy, and Rahmi et al. (2025) show that poorly designed digital systems add measurably to that load. In Nigerian academic libraries, where staff routinely improvise around fragmented infrastructure to keep research support running, these pressures are structural rather than incidental. What the LISIS framework adds is a reframing of burnout as arising from identity disequilibrium rather than from workload alone.

## Job satisfaction as an occupational outcome

Job satisfaction is treated here in Locke's (1976) sense, as the positive emotional state that follows from an appraisal of one's work, and it matters in this study because it is the second of the two indicators through which occupational mental health is measured. The LIS evidence is consistent on its determinants. Wood et al. (2020), applying the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory to academic librarians, found satisfaction falling as exhaustion rose. Zubairu and Onuoha (2024) found mentoring and job involvement to be significant predictors of satisfaction among library personnel in private universities in South West Nigeria, which points to recognition and inclusion rather than remuneration as the operative variables. Homayed et al. (2025) reach a comparable conclusion for academic staff more broadly, showing role ambiguity and role conflict predicting reduced organisational commitment. Shinde (2025) traces the sequence one step further, from emotional exhaustion to turnover intention. Read together, this literature suggests that satisfaction in academic library work is contingent on whether intellectual contribution is seen, which is precisely what the recognition deficit and role invisibility dimensions of the LISIS set out to capture.

## Mental health as an occupational construct

Occupational mental health, as distinct from clinical mental health, concerns the capacity to function, cope and contribute within a working environment (World Health Organization, 2022), and its measurement in workplace research generally proceeds through indicators rather than diagnoses. Diener's (1984) formulation of subjective wellbeing, combining a cognitive appraisal with an affective component, supplies the underlying logic for this approach: what is measured is the person's own evaluation of their situation and the emotional tone that accompanies it.

In occupational research the two indicators most commonly used to operationalise that evaluation are emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The first is drawn from the burnout literature (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Jacobs, 2024) and the second from Locke's tradition. The Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) supplies the mechanism that links them to working conditions. This study follows that convention exactly, and the boundaries of the claim should be understood accordingly. To describe the LISIS as an indicator of occupational mental health is to say that it predicts these two measured outcomes, not that it detects psychiatric morbidity.

## Resilience and peer support

Resilience, understood as the capacity to adapt in adversity, has emerged as a protective factor in emotionally demanding professions. Masten (2025) describes it as ordinary magic, while Vaughn and DeJonckheere (2021) emphasise its social-ecological dimensions and the part played by relationships, cultural narratives and access to resources. In Nigerian LIS workspaces, resilience is cultivated through improvisation, humour and peer mentoring. Ajani et al. (2024) observed that librarians rely on informal networks to navigate institutional neglect, and Adekoya et al. (2026) found that in the absence of formal research data management policies librarians used ad hoc methods such as flash drives and email to support researchers. These are situated practices, not deficiencies of competence.

Peer support plays a related role. Grégoire et al. (2024), in a randomised controlled trial, found that peer support programmes significantly reduced anxiety and improved emotional resilience among university students, a finding that transfers readily to LIS professionals working in comparable conditions. In Nigerian academic libraries, informal peer networks function as emotional ecosystems in the absence of formal support. Zubairu and Onuoha (2024) and Dunmade (2026) note that most LIS studies attend to formal mentorship or continuing professional development while overlooking the affective power of informal communities.

## The gap addressed

Despite growing interest in wellbeing, LIS scholarship lacks a unified account linking cognitive, emotional and identity-based stressors to mental health outcomes. Most studies are descriptive. Emotional labour is rarely integrated into LIS theory, cognitive load is acknowledged but not measured, resilience is treated as a personal trait rather than a relational construct, and identity strain is almost entirely absent from mainstream LIS discourse. The development and validation of the LISIS address these gaps by offering a context-sensitive, empirically grounded instrument for diagnosing identity-related strain in academic librarianship.

## Theoretical Framework

Three theories underpin the validation of the LISIS. Each is stated here with its originators, the year of its formulation, and the specific work it does in this study. Three rather than two are retained because they operate at different levels of the model and are not interchangeable: Social Identity Theory generates the four measured dimensions of the construct, Emotional Labour Theory accounts for the mechanism by which strain becomes exhaustion, and the Job Demands-Resources model situates both within institutional conditions. Removing any one of the three would leave either the construct or an outcome variable without a foundation.

Social Identity Theory, propounded by Tajfel and Turner (1979), holds that people draw much of their self-concept from membership of social and professional groups. Applied to librarians, identity is shaped not only by what the work involves but by how far that work is recognised and legitimised within the institution. Where a gap opens between how librarians see themselves and how the institution treats them, identity strain follows. This study adopts the theory because it yields directly the four dimensions the LISIS measures: role invisibility, the experience of going unseen despite real contribution; value misalignment, the tension between personal and institutional priorities; recognition deficit, the absence of reward for intellectual labour; and belonging ambiguity, uncertainty about one's legitimacy within the institution.

Emotional Labour Theory, developed by Hochschild (1983), accounts for the psychological cost of managing one's own emotions to meet workplace expectations. Librarians are expected to remain composed and helpful even under ethical tension or institutional neglect, and sustaining that regulation, whether through surface acting or deep acting, wears people down over time in the absence of support. The theory is adopted here because it supplies the mechanism connecting identity strain to emotional exhaustion, which is the first of the study's two outcome variables. Its relevance is sharpened in Nigerian academic libraries, where formal recognition of emotional work is largely absent. It functions in this study as an explanatory mechanism rather than a measured construct. No LISIS item assesses surface or deep acting, and the scale should not be read as an emotional labour instrument.

The Job Demands-Resources model, set out by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001), explains burnout as the outcome of job demands, including workload, emotional strain and role ambiguity, outstripping the resources available to meet them, including autonomy, peer support and institutional recognition. It is adopted here because it locates identity strain within institutional conditions rather than within individuals, which matters for a study conducted in under-resourced universities where librarians multitask across cataloguing, research support and administration with limited training or infrastructure.

Taken together, the three frame identity strain not as a fixed trait but as something that moves between personal values, emotional regulation and institutional structure. The LISIS is built to measure it across all three.

## Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods exploratory design to develop and validate the LISIS. The approach combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to secure both psychometric rigour and contextual sensitivity. The scale was developed and validated in six phases, following established scale development procedures (DeVellis, 2017), summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale development and validation sequence

| Phase | Purpose | Method | Key output |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Conceptualisation and item generation | Identify core dimensions of identity strain from theory and literature | Literature review; drafting of items across four theorised dimensions | 12-item pool (3 items per dimension) |
| 2. Expert review and content validation | Establish content validity | Panel review by 5 experts (LIS scholars, occupational psychologists, senior librarians); Content Validity Index scoring | Refined 12-item scale, all items CVI ≥ 0.80 |
| 3. Pilot testing and reliability | Assess internal consistency | Pilot with 30 early-career librarians across 3 universities; Cronbach's alpha | α = .79–.86 by subscale; α = .825 overall |
| 4. Construct validity | Test dimensional structure | Exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring, oblique rotation) | Four-factor structure emerged; loadings ≥ .60 |
| 5. Criterion validity | Test predictive utility | Correlation and regression against the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Job Satisfaction Survey | LISIS predicts emotional exhaustion (r = .62) and job satisfaction (r = -.55) |
| 6. Future validation | Extend the evidence base beyond this initial sample | Planned confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance testing, longitudinal follow-up | Not yet conducted; identified as a priority for future research |

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 1 answers the first research question. Phases 1 to 5 were completed within this study; phase 6 sets the agenda for the confirmatory work that must follow before the instrument can be regarded as fully established.

## Research design

The study was structured in two sequential phases. The first concerned scale development, including item generation, expert review and pilot testing. The second concerned scale validation through statistical analysis and triangulation with qualitative data. The design allowed numerical reliability metrics to be integrated with lived accounts.

## Instrument development

Items were generated from a review of the literature on professional identity strain, drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Emotional Labour Theory (Hochschild, 1983) and the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Four dimensions were conceptualised on this basis: role invisibility, value misalignment, recognition deficit and belonging ambiguity. Twelve items were drafted, three per dimension, in language appropriate to LIS professionals, and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Content validity was established by a panel of five experts comprising LIS scholars, occupational psychologists and senior academic librarians, who assessed each item for relevance, clarity and cultural appropriateness. The process produced minor revisions in phrasing and the removal of one ambiguous item. Content Validity Index scores were calculated for each retained item against a threshold of 0.80 (Polit & Beck, 2006), which all items met or exceeded.

## Study population and sampling

The target population comprised early-career academic librarians in Nigerian universities, defined here as professionals with ten years or fewer of post-qualification experience in academic librarianship. This focus reflects the identity-forming phase of professional development, during which individuals are particularly susceptible to institutional pressure, role ambiguity and identity strain.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from three universities, one federal, one state and one private, securing diversity of governance, resourcing and professional expectation. Only librarians meeting the early-career criterion and holding academic appointments were eligible. The final sample comprised fifty librarians for the quantitative survey, ten of whom were drawn into semi-structured interviews, with reflective journals submitted optionally by interviewees. The reliability, factor-analytic and inferential results reported below were computed on this full sample of fifty; the pilot noted in Table 1 was an earlier reliability check on thirty of these respondents, whose data were retained in the main analysis.

## Instrumentation

The survey comprised the twelve LISIS items together with two established instruments used to assess criterion validity: the Maslach Burnout Inventory, from which the emotional exhaustion subscale was taken, and the Job Satisfaction Survey.

## Data collection

Quantitative data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed in person and electronically. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and optional reflective journals, which captured participants' accounts of professional invisibility, emotional fatigue and institutional misrecognition.

## Ethical considerations

Participants received information sheets setting out the purpose, scope and confidentiality protocols of the study. Informed consent was secured before data collection and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymised during transcription and analysis, and digital records were stored in encrypted form. The three participating libraries were assigned randomly generated codes (U1, U2, U3) which carry no ranking or geographical meaning, and all transcripts, field notes and institutional documents were anonymised on the same basis. Participants were informed of this arrangement during consent.

## Data analysis and scoring

Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic variables and item responses. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha against a threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between LISIS scores, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, and multiple regression was used to test predictive validity, controlling for age, gender and years of experience. Qualitative data were thematically analysed and used to triangulate and contextualise the quantitative findings.

Scoring proceeds as follows. Subscale scores are the sum of the three items within each dimension, giving a range of 3 to 15, and the total identity strain score is the sum of all twelve items, giving a range of 12 to 60. A mean item score may be derived by dividing the total by twelve. Total scores of 12 to 24 indicate low identity strain, 25 to 42 moderate and 43 to 60 high, with the same three-band structure applying at subscale level, where 3 to 6 is low, 7 to 11 moderate and 12 to 15 high. A high subscale score points to a specific area of concern; a high recognition deficit score, for instance, signals undervaluation of intellectual labour. In practical

terms, low scores warrant no more than maintenance of existing support structures, moderate scores suggest monitoring for early signs of burnout together with peer support or mentoring, and high scores warrant institutional review, targeted support and role clarification.

## Results and Discussion

## Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 50)

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 28 | 56.0 |
| | Female | 22 | 44.0 |
| Age | 20–29 | 14 | 28.0 |
| | 30–39 | 26 | 52.0 |
| | 40–49 | 10 | 20.0 |
| Years of experience | Less than 2 years | 12 | 24.0 |
| | 2–5 years | 20 | 40.0 |
| | 6–10 years | 18 | 36.0 |
| Institution type | Federal university | 20 | 40.0 |
| | State university | 15 | 30.0 |
| | Private university | 15 | 30.0 |
| Designation | Assistant Librarian | 18 | 36.0 |
| | Librarian II | 14 | 28.0 |
| | Librarian I | 10 | 20.0 |
| | Senior Librarian | 8 | 16.0 |

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 2 shows a sample weighted towards the middle of the early-career band. Just over half of respondents (52.0%) were aged between 30 and 39, and three quarters (76.0%) had between two and ten years of post-qualification experience, with only 24.0% in their first two years. Nearly two thirds (64.0%) held the junior grades of Assistant Librarian or Librarian II. The distribution matters for interpretation, because these are the grades at which promotion criteria and institutional recognition begin to bear directly on career progression, and they are therefore the grades at which recognition deficit would be expected to register most sharply. Federal universities supplied 40.0% of respondents, with state and private institutions supplying 30.0% each, giving reasonable coverage of the three governance types without claiming national representativeness.

## Psychometric properties of the LISIS

Table 3: Exploratory factor analysis, factor loadings and subscale reliability

| Item statement | Factor 1 (RI) | Factor 2 (VM) | Factor 3 (RD) | Factor 4 (BA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My intellectual contributions are overlooked | 0.78 | | | |
| My role is misunderstood by colleagues | 0.74 | | | |
| Rarely acknowledged in academic forums | 0.71 | | | |
| Values not reflected in institutional priorities | | 0.76 | | |
| Ethical conflict with institutional expectations | | 0.72 | | |
| Commitment to access, equity or intellectual freedom undervalued | | 0.69 | | |
| Rarely recognised for research support | | | 0.81 | |
| Scholarly work not acknowledged in evaluations | | | 0.77 | |
| Excluded from intellectual reward opportunities | | | 0.74 | |
| Uncertain about place in academic community | | | | 0.73 |
| Feel peripheral to the university's strategic goals | | | | 0.71 |
| Identity not fully accepted in academic culture | | | | 0.68 |

Note. RI = role invisibility; VM = value misalignment; RD = recognition deficit; BA = belonging ambiguity. Loadings below 0.40 suppressed for clarity. Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation.

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 3 answers the second research question. Every item loaded on its intended factor at 0.68 or above, with no cross-loading reaching the 0.40 suppression threshold, which indicates that the four dimensions are empirically distinct rather than facets of a single undifferentiated strain. Sampling adequacy was confirmed by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure above 0.80 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < .001$). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .79 to .86 across the four subscales and stood at .825 for the full instrument, comfortably above the 0.70 threshold set by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The strongest loadings fall within recognition deficit, where the item on research support reached 0.81, and the weakest within belonging ambiguity, where acceptance of professional identity reached 0.68. That pattern is itself informative: recognition is experienced as a concrete, observable event, whereas belonging is diffuse and harder for respondents to locate, which is consistent with Neville's (2024) account of belonging as negotiated rather than declared.

## Level and dispersion of identity strain

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for LISIS dimensions

| Dimension | No. of items | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role invisibility | 3 | 4.2 | 0.61 | 2.7 | 5.0 |
| Value misalignment | 3 | 4.1 | 0.58 | 2.8 | 5.0 |

| Dimension | No. of items | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recognition deficit | 3 | 4.3 | 0.64 | 2.9 | 5.0 |
| Belonging ambiguity | 3 | 3.9 | 0.72 | 2.3 | 5.0 |
| LISIS overall | 12 | 4.13 | 0.64 | 2.68 | 5.0 |

Note. Means, minima and maxima are reported as item means on a five-point scale. Converted to the subscale totals used for banding, the thresholds are 1.00 to 2.00 for low strain, 2.33 to 3.67 for moderate and 4.00 to 5.00 for high.

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 4 answers the third research question, and it does so more fully once the item means are read against the scoring bands set out in the methodology. Recognition deficit records the highest mean at 4.3, which converts to a subscale total of 12.9 and falls within the high band. Role invisibility follows at 4.2, or 12.6, and value misalignment at 4.1, or 12.3, both also high. Belonging ambiguity is lowest at 3.9, converting to 11.7, which sits at the very top of the moderate band, just short of the high threshold of 12. The overall LISIS mean of 4.13 converts to a total score of 49.6 on the 12 to 60 range, placing the average respondent in this sample within the high band.

The minima are as informative as the means, and rather more decisive. The lowest observed score on any dimension was 2.3, on belonging ambiguity, which converts to a subscale total of approximately 7. Since the low band closes at 6, no respondent in this sample recorded low identity strain on any of the four dimensions. The lowest overall score, 2.68, converts to a total of roughly 32, which is well inside the moderate band. Every participant, in other words, registered at least moderate strain on every dimension measured, and the sample average sat in the high band overall and on three of the four dimensions. A sample of fifty in three institutions cannot establish national prevalence, and no such claim is made here. Within this sample, however, identity strain was not a minority experience but a shared condition.

The ordering of the four dimensions repays attention. What these librarians report most acutely is not doubt about whether they belong, but the absence of reward for work they know they have done. That is a structural complaint rather than an existential one, and it is in principle remediable through changes to appraisal and promotion practice.

Dispersion tells a second story. Belonging ambiguity carries both the widest standard deviation (0.72) and the widest range (2.3 to 5.0), while recognition deficit is compressed towards the top of the scale with a floor of 2.9. Recognition deficit, then, is felt with some uniformity across the sample; the sense of institutional inclusion varies considerably between individuals and settings. The distinction matters practically, since the first points towards policy reform and the second towards cultural change within particular faculties and libraries.

## Qualitative accounts by dimension

The interview and journal material is presented here dimension by dimension, following the quantitative results for each, so that the two strands may be read together rather than in parallel.

**Role invisibility.** A librarian from the federal university put the matter directly:

> We are academic staff, but the perception doesn't match the designation. People still treat us like we're just here to shelve books or fix printers. It's exhausting trying to prove your intellectual worth every day.

The account maps onto the highest-loading items in the role invisibility subscale, where professional contribution is obscured by an outdated stereotype of the work. Stevens-Wood and Attfield (2024) describe academic librarians as occupying liminal space, contributing to research, teaching and institutional development while excluded from strategic decision-making and scholarly recognition. The mean of 4.2 gives that observation a magnitude.

**Value misalignment.** A participant from the state university observed:

> I believe in open access, ethical data use, and supporting research integrity. But the institution is more concerned with rankings and metrics. It's hard to stay motivated when your values feel irrelevant.

Buschman (2024) contends that misalignment of this kind erodes professional identity and leads to emotional disengagement, particularly where performative indicators displace intellectual substance. The mean of 4.1, with a floor of 2.8, indicates that the tension is widely shared rather than idiosyncratic.

**Recognition deficit.** The dimension with the highest mean produced the most emphatic testimony. A participant from the private university reported:

> I've authored papers, designed data workflows, and trained faculty on research tools. Yet, when it's time for promotion or funding, my contributions are invisible.

This echoes Shinde's (2025) finding that intellectual contributions in service-oriented professions are routinely undervalued, with emotional fatigue and professional alienation following. Unver's (2026) account of the invisible load in the public sector applies with equal force. The convergence of the highest mean, the strongest factor loading in the instrument and the sharpest interview material makes recognition deficit the most pressing finding of this study.

**Belonging ambiguity.** A librarian from a private university reflected:

> I'm part of the academic staff, but I'm rarely invited to curriculum meetings or research clusters. It's like I'm present but not included.

Homayed et al. (2025) argue that ambiguous role definitions contribute to psychological strain and reduced organisational commitment. The wider dispersion observed in Table 4 is audible in the interviews as well, where accounts ranged

from exclusion of this kind to reports of genuine collegial inclusion within the same institution type.

## Relationship between identity strain and occupational mental health

Table 5: Correlation matrix, LISIS total and mental health indicators

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. LISIS total score | – | | |
| 2. Emotional exhaustion | .62** | – | |
| 3. Job satisfaction | -.55** | -.60** | – |

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed). N = 50. Coefficients are reported for the composite LISIS score; dimension-level correlations with job satisfaction were not computed, and the limitation is noted below.

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 5 answers the fourth research question. Identity strain correlates positively and strongly with emotional exhaustion ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) and negatively and moderately with job satisfaction ($r = -.55$, $p < .01$), while the two outcome variables are themselves inversely related ($r = -.60$, $p < .01$). The direction and magnitude of these associations are consistent with the Job Demands-Resources account (Demerouti et al., 2001), in which strain accumulates where demand outstrips resource, and with the finding of Wood et al. (2020) that satisfaction falls among academic librarians as exhaustion rises. A coefficient of .62 places identity strain among the stronger correlates of exhaustion reported in this literature, which is worth remarking given that the construct concerns recognition rather than workload.

## Predictive validity of the LISIS

Table 6: Multiple regression predicting emotional exhaustion

| Predictor | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role invisibility | 0.42 | 0.11 | .38 | 3.82 | < .001** |
| Value misalignment | 0.31 | 0.13 | .29 | 2.38 | .021* |
| Recognition deficit | 0.47 | 0.12 | .41 | 3.92 | < .001** |
| Belonging ambiguity | 0.36 | 0.14 | .33 | 2.57 | .014* |

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01. $R^2 = .51$, $F(4, 45) = 11.72$, $p < .001$. Age, gender and years of experience entered as controls.

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

Table 6 answers the fifth research question. All four dimensions predict emotional exhaustion significantly, and together they account for 51 per cent of its variance, a substantial proportion for a four-predictor model in occupational research. Recognition deficit is the strongest predictor ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$), followed

by role invisibility (β = .38, p < .01), with belonging ambiguity (β = .33) and value misalignment (β = .29) making smaller but significant contributions. The ordering repeats what Table 4 showed descriptively and what the interviews expressed in narrative form, and convergence across three forms of evidence is worth more than any one of them alone.

The practical reading is that exhaustion among these librarians is driven less by what they are asked to do than by whether it is seen. Recognition deficit and role invisibility, the two dimensions concerned with visibility of contribution, carry the greater part of the explained variance between them. This supports the reframing of burnout proposed here as a product of identity disequilibrium rather than of workload alone, and it accords with Stanfield's (2025) argument that burnout in LIS is a systemic outcome rather than a personal failing. It also carries a caution. Interventions aimed at workload alone, which is where institutional attention usually falls, would leave the larger share of the problem untouched.

## Hypothesis testing

Table 7: Summary of hypothesis testing

| Hypothesis | Statistic | Decision |
|---|---|---|
| $H_{01}$: Role invisibility does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion | β = .38, t = 3.82, p < .001 | Rejected |
| $H_{02}$: Value misalignment does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion | β = .29, t = 2.38, p = .021 | Rejected |
| $H_{03}$: Recognition deficit does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion | β = .41, t = 3.92, p < .001 | Rejected |
| $H_{04}$: Belonging ambiguity does not significantly predict emotional exhaustion | β = .33, t = 2.57, p = .014 | Rejected |
| $H_{05}$: The LISIS does not significantly predict occupational mental health outcomes | r = .62 with emotional exhaustion and r = -.55 with job satisfaction, both p < .01; $R^2$ = .51, F(4, 45) = 11.72, p < .001 | Rejected |

Source: Researchers' field survey (2026)

All five null hypotheses are rejected at the 0.05 level. The decisions on $H_{01}$ to $H_{04}$ rest on the regression coefficients reported in Table 6, and the decision on $H_{05}$ on the composite correlations in Table 5 together with the overall regression model. Because the dimension-level analyses were conducted against emotional exhaustion only, no claim is entered here about the relationship between individual dimensions and job satisfaction.

## Implications of the Findings

Three implications emerge from this study. The first is methodological. The LISIS performs as intended on this sample, with acceptable internal consistency, a clean four-factor structure and demonstrated criterion validity against two established

instruments. It offers LIS researchers a measure of a construct that has until now been described but not quantified. That claim should be held at the appropriate strength. Exploratory factor analysis on fifty respondents establishes plausibility rather than structure, and confirmatory testing on a larger and more varied sample remains outstanding.

The second is theoretical. Burnout in academic librarianship has generally been modelled as a function of demand. The evidence here suggests that recognition operates as a variable in its own right, with the two visibility dimensions accounting for the larger share of explained variance in exhaustion. This does not displace the Job Demands-Resources account so much as specify what counts as a resource in this setting: institutional recognition functions as one, and its absence registers as a demand.

The third is practical. Because the strongest driver identified here is recognition deficit, and because recognition is governed by promotion criteria, appraisal instruments and committee membership, the finding points towards changes that are administratively tractable. Institutions cannot legislate for belonging, but they can specify that research support, data stewardship and scholarly communication count in appraisal.

## Limitations

Four limitations bear on how far these findings can be taken, and they are stated here rather than left for the reader to infer.

The first concerns sample size. Fifty respondents across three institutions gives roughly four cases per item, which falls below the five to ten per item ordinarily recommended for exploratory factor analysis. The four-factor solution reported in Table 3 should therefore be treated as provisional support for the theorised structure rather than as its confirmation. The high loadings and the absence of cross-loading are encouraging, but they were obtained on a sample smaller than the technique prefers, and confirmatory factor analysis on a larger sample remains the necessary next step.

The second concerns design. The data are cross-sectional, so the associations reported between identity strain and the two outcome indicators are associations and nothing more. Whether strain precedes exhaustion, follows from it, or moves alongside it cannot be settled here.

The third concerns the level at which relationships were tested. Correlations with job satisfaction were computed for the composite LISIS score, and the regression model addresses emotional exhaustion at dimension level. Dimension-level relationships with job satisfaction were not tested, and both the hypotheses and the claims made in this article have been framed accordingly.

The fourth concerns construct coverage. Emotional labour is drawn on to explain how identity strain becomes exhaustion, but it is not itself measured by the LISIS. An instrument that captured surface and deep acting alongside the four

identity dimensions would allow that mechanism to be tested rather than assumed, and this is a natural next step for the scale.

## Conclusion

This study set out to develop and provide an initial validation of the LIS Identity Strain Scale as a context-sensitive instrument for assessing professional identity strain among academic librarians in Nigeria. Working from a three-part theoretical framework and a mixed-methods design, it finds that identity strain, expressed through role invisibility, value misalignment, recognition deficit and belonging ambiguity, is both widespread and psychologically consequential in resource-constrained academic settings.

The instrument performed to standard on the measures reported here. Internal consistency reached .825 overall, with subscale values between .79 and .86, and exploratory factor analysis returned the four theorised dimensions with all loadings at .68 or above, on a sample small enough that the structure should be regarded as provisional. Identity strain correlated with emotional exhaustion at .62 and with job satisfaction at -.55, both significant at $p < .01$, and the four dimensions together explained 51 per cent of the variance in emotional exhaustion. All five null hypotheses were rejected. Recognition deficit emerged consistently as the strongest single dimension, on the descriptive statistics, in the regression model and in the interview material alike. Reading the item means against the scoring bands, no respondent recorded low strain on any dimension and the sample average fell within the high band. This evidence is preliminary and rests on fifty respondents in three institutions. It awaits confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance testing and longitudinal follow-up before the scale can be treated as established.

Nigerian librarians formally hold academic status, yet many continue to work within institutional cultures that overlook their intellectual contributions and misread their professional role. The gap between designation and perception, on this evidence, adds materially to the emotional labour the work already involves. Professional identity strain looks less like a peripheral concern for LIS practice than something closer to its centre. Addressing it will take more than a validated instrument. What this study offers is a starting point for that work, not its conclusion.

## Recommendations

Five recommendations follow from the findings.

1. Given that recognition deficit emerged as the strongest predictor of exhaustion, promotion and appraisal systems should be revised to reflect the full scope of librarians' work, including research support, data stewardship and scholarly communication. Recognition mechanisms should be transparent and aligned with the evolving nature of LIS roles.

2. Institutions should integrate librarians into academic governance, curriculum development and research strategy rather than confining recognition to symbolic gestures. This addresses role invisibility, the second strongest predictor in the model.
3. Professional development programmes should include provision on emotional labour, identity resilience and ethical alignment, tailored to the realities of resource-constrained environments where institutional support is limited.
4. Peer support networks should be formalised and institutionally supported. Informal communities already provide emotional sustenance, as both this study and Grégoire et al. (2024) indicate, and structured peer mentoring would extend that provision while reducing belonging ambiguity.
5. National LIS bodies and university libraries might adopt the LISIS as part of routine wellbeing assessment, subject to the confirmatory work identified above. Used with the scoring bands set out in the methodology, it would support targeted intervention and longitudinal tracking rather than reactive response.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A: Questionnaire**

**Department of Library and Information Science, University of Ilorin**

**LIS Identity Strain Questionnaire for Early-Career Professionals**

Instructions: kindly tick (√) the response that fits your data or choice on each of the questionnaire items.

Section I: Demographic data

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 20–29 ☐ 30–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50 and above
3. Highest educational qualification: ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ PhD ☐ Other (please specify)
4. Years of professional experience in academic librarianship: ☐ Less than 2 years ☐ 2–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ More than 10 years (not eligible for this study)
5. Institution type: ☐ Federal university ☐ State university ☐ Private university
6. Current designation: ☐ Assistant Librarian ☐ Librarian II ☐ Librarian I ☐ Senior Librarian ☐ Other (please specify)

Section II: Please tick the response you most agree with.

| Dimension | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role invisibility | 1. My intellectual contributions are often overlooked within my institution. | | | | | |
| | 2. My role as an academic librarian is misunderstood by colleagues outside the library. | | | | | |
| | 3. I am rarely acknowledged in academic forums or scholarly spaces. | | | | | |
| Value misalign-ment | 4. The values I hold as a librarian are not reflected in institutional priorities. | | | | | |
| | 5. I often experience ethical conflict between my professional values and institutional expectations. | | | | | |
| | 6. My commitment to access, equity or intellectual freedom is undervalued in my workplace. | | | | | |
| Recognition deficit | 7. I am rarely recognised for the research support I provide to faculty and students. | | | | | |
| | 8. My scholarly work is not acknowledged in performance evaluations or promo-tions. | | | | | |
| | 9. I am excluded from opportunities for intellectual recognition or reward. | | | | | |

| Dimension | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belonging ambiguity | 10. I feel uncertain about my place in the academic community. | | | | | |
| | 11. I often feel peripheral to the university's strategic goals. | | | | | |
| | 12. My professional identity is not fully accepted within the academic culture. | | | | | |

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

**Department of Library and Information Science, University of Ilorin**

Opening: thank you for agreeing to take part. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of early-career academic librarians in relation to professional identity, recognition and wellbeing. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Section 1: Professional role and identity

1. How would you describe your role within the university?
2. Do you feel your professional identity as an academic librarian is well understood by others in your institution?
3. Have you ever felt invisible or overlooked in your academic environment?

Section 2: Value alignment

1. What values guide your work as a librarian?
2. Do you feel these values are reflected in your institution's priorities or culture?
3. Have you experienced any ethical or philosophical tensions between your role and institutional expectations?

Section 3: Recognition and intellectual contribution

1. In what ways are your intellectual contributions acknowledged or recognised?
2. Have you ever felt excluded from scholarly or academic recognition?
3. How do performance evaluations or promotion processes reflect your work?

Section 4: Belonging and inclusion

1. Do you feel a sense of belonging within the academic community?
2. How would you describe your inclusion in strategic or intellectual conversations at your institution?
3. Are there moments when you have felt uncertain about your place in the university?

Section 5: Coping and resilience

1. What strategies do you use to cope with professional stress or identity strain?
2. Are there support systems, formal or informal, that help you navigate your role?
3. What changes would you recommend to improve the experience of academic librarians?

Closing: thank you for sharing your experiences. If you have any questions or would like to receive a summary of the findings, please let me know.