



**Understanding the Prospects and Potential for Improved Regional LIS Collaboration in the Developing World: An Empirical Study of LIS Departments in the GCC States**

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**Abstract:**

**Introduction:** *The purpose of the study was to generate information on the extent and types of collaboration occurring between academic LIS departments and faculty in the GCC states, and on the factors influencing this, to help inform policies and strategies designed to improve collaboration.*

**Method:** *This is a qualitative research study, based on interviews with Heads of LIS Departments in the GCC states. The researchers emailed all Heads of LIS Departments (n=9) in Universities within the GCC States to invite them to participate in an interview*

*about their experiences of and views on collaboration with other LIS departments in the region.*

***Analysis:*** *Of the (9) Heads of Departments, only 5 responded to the e-mail invitation and subsequently completed the interview. The qualitative research data generated from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The data were examined and a preliminary set of themes created, then, the data were re-examined and coded according to the preliminary themes.*

***Results:*** *It was found that very little formal collaboration has taken place to date, but that Heads of Departments are well aware of the many potential benefits of collaboration, and the types of barriers that must be overcome to achieve this. The findings have theoretical significance relating to the potential role of LIS collaboration in developing regions more generally, and practical implications for the development of strategies and initiatives to improve collaboration in the Gulf region. A four-stage strategy development, planning, establishment and implementation model is proposed to underpin the program of work necessary to achieve this, which can also be applied to other developing regions.*

***Conclusion:*** *This is the first empirical research study with a main focus on investigating LIS collaboration in the Gulf region, and one of relatively few studies that have explored LIS collaboration and its potential in the developing world.*

***Keywords:*** *GCC Countries, LIS in Developing Countries, LIS Collaboration, LIS in Developing Countries, LIS Collaboration Challenges, Prospects for LIS Collaboration in GCC, Collaboration Model.*

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## **Introduction**

The academic discipline of Library and Information Science (LIS) is especially important in developing countries, where high quality information services are essential to meet the needs of educators, government and businesses and thus underpin social and economic development. In many developing countries including the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states, the field of LIS has been rapidly expanding to meet the rapidly expanding information needs of the economies and populations. There are now nine LIS departments in the Gulf region, including six in Saudi Arabia, two in Kuwait and one in Oman.

However, as noted in an earlier paper in which the author reviewed previous LIS research (Al-Suqri, 2010), there is some evidence of shortcomings in resources, expertise and facilities which may seriously threaten the future sustainability of LIS in this region, especially in the context of the changing LIS environment and the nature of information seeking and information use. In Europe and North America, and in some parts of the developing world, regional collaboration between LIS schools has emerged as a strategy contributing to the growth and sustainability of this field, and is generating innovative ways of addressing resource limitations, the impact of technological change, and other challenges facing the profession (Abdullahi, Kajberg, & Virkus, 2007; Lin, 2004; Virkus, 2007).

In the Gulf States of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, many of the pre-conditions for collaboration in LIS are already in place. These countries have similar historical, linguistic, political and cultural characteristics (Al-Ansari, Rehman, & Yousef, 2001) and a good record of regional co-operation in social, economic and business matters, reflected in the formation and activities of the Gulf Co-operation Council. Within the field of Library and Information Science, however, there is scanty evidence from the literature of the types of regional collaboration that are proving successful in other parts of the world (Al Suqri, 2010). Very few research studies have been conducted into LIS education in the GCC states, and little is known about the extent and nature of any collaboration between LIS departments in this region. Only two empirical studies conducted since 2000 could be identified that have examined the characteristics and behavior of faculty in the region's LIS departments (Al-Ansari et al., 2001; Rehman, 2008), while formal associations appear to be limited to the Special Libraries Association Arabian Gulf Chapter (<http://units.sla.org/chapter/cag/website/SLA-AGC.html>), which holds annual conferences in the region, and participation in the International Federation of Library Association's Asia and Oceania regional section.

This article reports on a qualitative study which has been conducted to address this knowledge gap by generating information in in-depth interviews with LIS Heads of Departments on their experiences of regional collaboration, perceived influences on and barriers to improved collaboration and what might be done to strengthen linkages between LIS departments and faculty throughout the region. The findings are used to develop a proposed model and recommendations for the development of programs and strategies for improving LIS collaboration in the Gulf region, in order to strengthen this field and ensure that it remains sustainable and cost-effective. In this way, the research is intended to contribute to the social and economic development of the Gulf States, since a strong information sector and access to reliable and accurate information is crucial for development, and LIS departments play a key role in delivering this.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A strong LIS sector is important to underpin and drive socio-economic development in the countries of the Gulf region and, in response to this need, nine academic LIS departments have already been established in the region. In common with their professional peers in other parts of the world, the LIS specialists in the GCC States are under immense pressure to keep up with developments in their field that reflect the changing nature of the information-seeking environment, such as the shift from print-based to digital or electronic resources and the increasing demands for more user-centered services. At the same time, they face challenges more specific to developing countries and to the Gulf region in particular, including the relative immaturity of the sector, technological limitations and problems relating to the digitization of resources in Arabic languages.

In other regions, collaboration between LIS departments has become one of the main strategies for strengthening the sector and pooling resources and expertise to deal with the challenges faced. The little empirical research that has been conducted to date into LIS in the

Gulf region suggests that there are very low levels of collaboration between LIS departments in this region; neither is there any evidence of the emergence of a collaborative entity at regional level other than the Special Libraries Association Arabian Gulf Chapter. It might be expected that technological advances and the increased availability of good Internet access in the region in recent years may have promoted increased collaboration between faculty and departments. However, the lack of research in this area means that little is known about the actual extent and nature of LIS collaboration in the Gulf region, or about the influences on and potential barriers to its expansion. This information is urgently needed to inform the development and promotion of programs and strategies to improve collaboration, in order to strengthen the LIS sector and ensure that it can meet the information needs of the regional population and support socio-economic development.

### **Objectives and Questions of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to generate information on the extent and types of collaboration occurring between academic LIS departments and faculty in the GCC states, and on the factors influencing this, to help inform policies and strategies designed to improve collaboration.

The study was designed to answer the following five questions:

1. What forms of collaboration, or attempts to collaborate, have occurred between LIS departments in the Gulf Region, and what were the objectives and outcomes of these?
2. What do LIS Heads of Departments see as the main influences on or barriers to collaboration within the region?
3. What are the perceived benefits of collaboration between LIS departments in the Gulf region, according to LIS Heads of Departments?

4. What do LIS Heads of Departments know about the use of collaboration in LIS in other regions of the world?
5. What needs to happen in order to strengthen LIS collaboration within the Gulf region?

### **Review of Literature**

Collaboration has been a significant theme in the LIS literature in recent years. This has been highlighted as one of the main strategies that LIS schools are using to cope with the challenges and demands of a rapidly evolving environment. An important sub-theme relates to the barriers to LIS collaboration in developing countries, and the ways in which some countries and regions are overcoming these. In this section, the key findings of literature relevant to the proposed study are summarized, and the information gaps described in order to highlight the need for and expected benefits of the proposed research.

#### *Trends in Regional LIS Collaboration*

A growing trend in regional and international collaboration has been documented in the literature (Chaudhry, 2007). Defined by Lin as “active partnerships with resources being shared or work being done by multiple partners in coordinated effort for the common good” (Lin, 2004, p.2), collaboration is often used in a regional context to address specific problems or issues facing LIS education (Ocholla, 2007). The benefits of this include the ability to pool knowledge and expertise, make optimum use of available resources, minimize costs and avoid duplication of effort (Kigongo-Bukenya & Musoke, 2011; Ocholla 2007). Forms of collaboration range from informal networks of professionals to highly structured programs sponsored by governments or inter-governmental organizations. More specific examples from the literature include joint research programs or quality control initiatives, faculty and student exchange schemes, conferences and workshops, shared online resources, online

forums and the joint development of textbooks or other learning materials (Dablio, 2007; Khoo, Majid, & Chaudhry, 2003; Ocholla, 2007; Sulisty-Basuk, 2006).

These collaborative activities have become especially important in view of the many changes in the LIS environment in recent years, especially the transition from print-based to digital and electronic collections and to a more “user-centered” approach to information delivery (Goswani & Jain, 2008; Miwa, 2006). These have resulted, for example, in a growing need for Information Literacy to be included within LIS curricula (Karissiddappa, Pors, & Weech, 2004). At the same time, reduced funding in many countries has severely constrained the resources available to LIS schools, both in developed and developing regions (Abdullahi, Kajbert, & Virkus, 2004; Juznic & Badovinac, 2005).

In many areas of the world, large-scale collaborations have been established to tackle these challenges in the form of professional associations. In the U.S. the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) conducts various professional development activities and knowledge sharing forums such as an annual conference and Special Interest Groups (Abdullahi et al., 2004; Lin, 2004; Montague, 2005) to achieve the objective of promoting excellence in LIS teaching, research and services (Dablio, 2007). Similarly, the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID) promotes collaboration between library schools in areas such as curriculum development and research (Abdullahi & Kajberg, 2004; Lin 2004). At an international level, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has a section on Education and Training, which encourages international co-operation among academic LIS departments in areas such as curriculum, accreditation and continuing professional development (Abdullahi et al., 2004).

### *The Challenges of LIS Collaboration in Developing Regions*

In general, the literature in this area indicates that LIS collaboration is much less advanced in developing regions than in the West. Lin (2004) documented evidence of local or domestic collaborative activities in East Asian countries, and some involvement in international collaborations, but a lack of interest or activities at regional level (2004). Alimohammadi and Jamali (2011) argued on the basis of a review of literature on LIS education in Asia that scientific exchange and cooperation is lacking between LIS professionals even at local level or within institutions, while Ochella (2007) observed in the African context that cooperation between LIS schools in the region is weak and mostly informal.

Various barriers to collaboration between LIS schools within developing regions have been cited in the literature. These include political, cultural and linguistic differences between countries (Abdullahi & Kajberg, 2004; Juznic & Badovinac, 2005; Ocholla, 2007); administrative or legal hurdles in establishing collaboration beyond national boundaries, (Al-Suqri, 2010); the time and costs required to establish and participate in collaborative activities (Kigongo-Bukenya & Musoke, 2011); inadequate public funding or other supports (Al-Suqri, 2010; Kigongo-Bukenya & Musoke, 2011), weak IT infrastructure or IT proficiency (Al-Suqri, 2010), as well as the psychological factors that sometimes affect willingness to share resources and work collaboratively (Kigongo-Bukenya & Musoke, 2011). Although cost and funding constraints are often significant barriers, previous research in this area demonstrates that increased funding alone is inadequate to promote successful collaboration. For example, Kigongo-Bukenya and Musoke (2011) cited attempts to establish regional LIS associations in Africa which failed due to a lack of support and commitment to the initiatives from founding partners, and a failure to consider how they would be sustained in the longer term.

Beerens (2004) argued that collaboration is most successful when the partners have compatible backgrounds as well as complementary resources. Despite this, the south-east Asian countries have successfully overcome their cultural and linguistic differences to achieve a high level of regional collaboration, which to date has included the establishment of a repository of shared teaching materials for use by schools throughout the region as well as curriculum and faculty development initiatives and regular conferences (Chaudhry, 2007; Khoo, Singh, & Chaudhry, 2006). In the diverse Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asian region, funding from the Open Society Institute has been used to establish a network of training centers for LIS professional development (Robinson & Glosiene, 2007). In contrast, in developing regions and even within countries where successful collaboration has not been achieved, there is often wasteful duplication of effort, increased costs and inefficiencies. For example, Goswami and Jain (2008) noted that in India, which has no standardized practices for manuscript digitization, most libraries are implementing their own digitization projects.

Advances in technology offer tremendous potential for improved collaboration, through co-operative ventures such as virtual learning communities and online education resources (Chaparrío-Univazo, 2005; Ponti, 2008). Projects are underway to investigate new ways of working and how they can benefit LIS professionals (Sonnenwald, Lassi, Olson, Ponti, & Axelsson, 2009), the outcomes of which will be important to the prospects for future regional collaboration in the developing world.

#### *Research Findings and Information Gaps relating to the Gulf Region*

The only known empirical study that directly explored LIS collaboration, among other factors, in GCC States was conducted by Al-Ansari et al. (2001), who reported from their survey of library school faculty that none were active in professional forums in their own countries or the wider region. Rehman's (2008) study of quality assurance provided a wealth

of empirical data on the resources and quality assurance procedures of LIS departments in the GCC States, but he did not investigate collaboration other than external review for evaluation purposes. Of nine LIS departments participating in this study, five had used external experts for review purposes but it is not known whether these experts were from within or outside the region. In recent years, increased access to the Internet might be expected to have had a major impact on informal networking and encouraged more collaborative working. However, no recent studies have investigated this or the factors which may promote or hinder the expansion of LIS collaboration within the Gulf region.

### **Methods**

This is a qualitative research study based on semi-structured interviews with Heads of LIS Departments within universities in the Gulf states. Qualitative methods were selected for the study because the main objective was to investigate the experiences and views of individuals in depth, specifically relating to the types of LIS collaboration that have occurred between LIS departments within the Gulf region, and regarding the factors that are perceived to influence levels or forms of collaboration. Although data collection was semi-structured, in that the main questions were put to Heads of Departments in the same way for consistency of meaning, participants were encouraged to respond with any information they see as relevant, and to convey this in their own words. The semi-structured interview format used also allowed the interviewers to probe for further information or clarification of responses, in order to ensure that as much relevant data as possible was collected.

Initially, the researchers emailed all Heads of LIS Departments ( $n=9$ ) in Universities within the GCC States to invite them to participate in an interview about their experiences and views on collaboration with other LIS departments in the region. The invitation letter explained the purpose of the study, and stressed the importance of their participation to ensure that the findings and resulting recommendations would reflect the experiences of all

LIS departments. The Heads of Departments were given the option of a face-to-face or telephone interview. A copy of the interview guide used for the study is attached as Annex A.

### *Coding and Analysis Procedures*

The qualitative research data generated from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The data were examined and a preliminary set of themes created, which were based on the main research questions. Then, the data were re-examined and coded according to the preliminary themes, and additional themes were added as necessary (Al-Suqri, 2011).

## **Findings**

### *Respondents Profile*

Of the original 9 Heads of Departments, only 5 responded to the e-mail invitation and subsequently completed the interview as follow:

Table 2 *Characteristics of Respondents (N=9)*

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Academic Rank</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	Assistant Professor	Department of Information Studies	Sultan Qaboos University	Oman
2	Associate Professor	Department of Information Studies	Imam Mohammed Bin Saud University	Saudi Arabia
3	Assistant Professor	Department of Information & Learning Resources	Taibah University	Saudi Arabia
4	Assistant Professor	Department of Information Science	Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University	Saudi Arabia
5	Assistant Professor	Information Science Department	Umm Al-Qura University	Saudi Arabia

### *Progress in and Prospects for LIS Collaboration in the Gulf Region*

The interview findings indicated that there has been little formal collaboration between LIS departments in the Gulf region to date, with interviewees reporting that they were not aware of any official programs covering activities such as shared training, exchange visits or established processes for sharing of information between university departments. It was noted, however, that some informal collaboration takes place in the form of workshops and conferences which facilitate communication between the faculty of the LIS departments, such as the annual LIS conference of the Special Libraries Association Arabian Gulf Chapter. However, this form of informal networking has mainly involved individual faculty members in their own professional capacities, and has not yet been the vehicle for academic collaboration between university departments.

Despite the lack of progress to date in this area, the Heads of Departments who participated in the research were generally optimistic about the prospects for improved collaboration, citing as driving factors their similar interests and needs in the development of LIS, as well as the commonalities between their societies in terms of factors such as language, religion, culture, politics and education systems. Many specific potential benefits of improved collaboration were cited, including:

- Exchange of expertise and professional knowledge, e.g. relating to LIS development or teaching methods.
- The ability to move freely between departments delivering courses and training
- Access to a wide base of human resources, courses, research and jobs
- Reduced duplication and costs in the design and implementation of research
- Increase in publication outlets
- Improvement in skills and the quality of education

Increased centralization of authority of LIS in the Gulf region, was seen as a potential drawback of greater collaboration, but on balance the number of expected benefits cited far outweighed the perceived risks.

Specific methods and collaborative tools that could help deliver these benefits, as suggested by the interviewees, include conferences and seminars; the use of online social networks or a webpage for communication between departmental staff; study visits and training for students, which could be tailored to regional job markets, and exchange programs for academic staff.

These ideas were drawn largely from the interviewees' existing knowledge of the collaboration in LIS in other regions of the world, which proved to be quite extensive. Specific overseas initiatives offered as examples included the shared Electronic Theses and Dissertations Programme operated between universities in Australia and New Zealand; the "M25" project which facilitates communication and collaboration between staff in 25 academic libraries in the UK, and an educational and scientific collaboration between the University of Wisconsin-Milwaki and the Zhengzhou University in South Korea which includes joint research activities, faculty and student exchanges and exchange of information.

#### *Barriers to Collaboration*

In order to generate a better understanding of why greater progress in collaboration in LIS has not yet been achieved in the Gulf region, despite the cited benefits and extensive knowledge of overseas initiatives, the interviews explored Heads of Departments' perceptions of the main barriers to collaboration in their region. A number of factors were cited, which can be broadly categorized as practical and people-related barriers:

*First: Practical barriers included the following:*

- Inadequate infrastructure (collaboration is hindered by relatively poor telecommunications, Internet facilities and road/transportation networks)

- Constraining impact of national and regional political issues on collaboration at university and departmental level
- Inadequate funding available for collaborative activities
- Inconsistencies and incompatibilities between LIS departments, for example with regard to program requirements and student selection criteria

*Second: People-related barriers included:*

- Differences in the perceptions and perspectives of departmental staff regarding education and research
- Failure to appoint suitable people to lead collaboration projects, e.g. those who don't have a strong personal interest in their outcomes
- Reluctance to share information or expertise due to a lack of familiarity with and trust in faculty in other universities
- Lack of knowledge about other LIS programs in the region
- Lack of awareness of the potential benefits of collaboration
- Initial enthusiasm, but failure to follow through

*Success Factors and Next Steps*

Several critical success factors for achieving improved collaboration between their departments were identified by the interviewees. Above all, the importance of having leaders and managers – both at departmental and institutional level – who are committed to collaboration was highlighted. These individuals should ideally lead by example by establishing or becoming actively involved in collaboration initiatives, and should support such efforts and ensure that adequate resources are allocated to them. It was also noted that appropriate people should be appointed to lead collaboration projects and should have their time freed up from other responsibilities to enable them to do so effectively. Efforts also

need to be made to increase awareness and understanding of staff about the benefits of working collaboratively.

It was suggested that a gradual approach to collaboration is needed, starting for example with joint research projects and progressing to symposiums and similar activities. In the early stages, fact-finding visits and meetings to exchange ideas and suggestions and share previous experiences are needed, following which a long-term strategy should be built for collaboration among LIS departments in the region.

### **Discussion and Proposed Model for LIS Collaboration in the Gulf Region**

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that there are good prospects for the evolution of collaboration between LIS academic departments in the Gulf region, but also a realistic understanding of the potential barriers to progress and what needs to be achieved in order to overcome these and realize the benefits of collaboration. In particular, it was highlighted that the departments cannot achieve this alone without the full support of their parent institutions, and with adequate funding. There is thus an initial need for extensive awareness-raising and information dissemination targeted not only at staff within the LIS departments, but at university leadership and key stakeholders in the wider society such as Ministers and senior officials in government departments with education and research funding responsibilities.

Over time, improvements in national infrastructures and in information technology are likely to facilitate greater collaboration in LIS, but this will only be achieved in practice if attitudes to sharing information, expertise and resources also change and these may be the most intractable types of barrier. What is perhaps most evident from the research findings is that improved communications between departments must precede and be the stepping stone to collaboration, since a greater familiarity with other departments, their programs and faculty

is essential in order to build trust and identify opportunities for collaborative efforts and initiatives.

Taking all this into account, a four stage model for improving collaboration among LIS departments in the Gulf region is proposed:

*Strategy Development:* Heads of Departments attend an initial meeting or symposium to review the findings of this research study and develop a broad strategy for future collaboration, setting out top-level goals and areas of potential collaboration.

*Planning:* Each LIS Department appoints a Collaboration Program Liaison Representative from their academic staff, to be responsible with their counterparts from other Departments for the joint development of:

1. A forward plan for implementation of the strategy, with estimated resource requirements.
2. A communications plan for raising awareness and disseminating information to internal and external stakeholders about potential areas for collaboration, required inputs and expected benefits.
3. Mechanisms for securing additional funding to support collaborative activities.

*Establishment:* Heads of LIS departments reconvene to consider and approve plans for implementation and funding of the collaboration strategy, and to agree departmental-level responsibilities for leadership of specific initiatives (e.g. arranging a conference or program of exchange visits).

*Implementation:* Initiatives are implemented and their outcomes monitored (e.g. through follow up surveys of participants or other feedback mechanisms). Subject to the agreed plan, it is suggested that these are introduced in two phases as follows:

*Phase 1: Initial activities would include:*

- Regional LIS website or online social networks developed and their use promoted among departmental staff and students.
- A newsletter or bulletin is produced and disseminating showcasing successful examples of LIS collaboration within the region and overseas, and profiling individual departments and academic staff.
- Establishment of working groups to take forward collaboration projects

*Phase 2: Longer-term activities would include:*

- Regional or international conference or symposium on LIS collaboration is organized and hosted by the Gulf States universities, with visiting speakers representing successful collaboration initiatives from overseas.
- Opportunities are actively sought and adopted for research collaboration and joint-funding of research between departments.
- Formal exchange programs and study visits are established.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study**

As far as is known, this has been the first empirical research study with a main focus on investigating LIS collaboration in the Gulf region, and one of relatively few studies that have explored LIS collaboration and its potential in the developing world. From a theoretical perspective, it represents a significant contribution to our understanding of why collaboration may not progress significantly in a developing region unless certain types of barriers can be overcome, and has identified the types of barriers that exist. The approach and model that has been developed to overcome these barriers builds on but is not specific to the Gulf region, and can readily be applied to LIS in any region of the developing world.

From a more practical perspective, the specific findings and the proposed model are expected to be invaluable in the development of specific strategies and initiatives to improve LIS collaboration in the Gulf region, so that the LIS departments and their graduates are able to successfully support the information needs of the rapidly developing economies and societies of this region. If these recommendations are adopted by the LIS departments, universities and other regional bodies, the expected outcome will be a significantly strengthened LIS sector, considerable linkages between departments in the region and collaborative initiatives for addressing the challenges facing LIS professionals in the 21st Century. If these positive outcomes can be achieved, the LIS sector of the Gulf region is likely to become a world leader and a best practice example of collaboration in LIS in the developing world, providing a model which can be adapted to other areas to strengthen the LIS sector and help promote socio-economic development.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is that it has been based only on interviews with LIS Heads of Departments in the Gulf region. This is not regarded as a major weakness, because this group is likely to have the greatest influence on progress in collaboration between their departments, and their own perspectives and understanding of the issues and potential of collaboration are of tremendous importance. Nevertheless, the future prospects for collaboration will also be influenced by the attitudes and actions of other key stakeholders, especially other academic staff, relevant government officials and institutional leaders, whose knowledge of and views on LIS collaboration have not been explored.

### **Future Research**

In view of the above, it is recommended that future research should explore the views on LIS collaboration of a wider range of stakeholders in the Gulf region, so that strategies and initiatives can be developed which these stakeholders are likely to be responsive to and

supportive of, or which are targeted at changing obstructive attitudes and raising awareness of the benefits of collaboration. In the wider context, this study has revealed the value and benefits of conducting interview-based research in order to illuminate the factors that hinder or help drive progress in LIS collaboration, and this approach might usefully be adopted by researchers in other developing regions to inform the development of strategies to promote collaboration and generate benefits for the LIS profession.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In many developed and some developing regions of the world, collaboration between academic LIS departments has become well-established and is delivering real value for the profession and ultimately for the societies involved. The Gulf region is still lagging behind in LIS collaboration despite the social, political and cultural similarities of its nation states; however, the findings of this research are positive, indicating that Heads of LIS Departments in the region have high levels of awareness of the potential benefits of collaboration and the barriers that must be overcome to achieve these. This is a good start, but committed efforts at the outset – and allocated funding – will be required to ensure longer-term success. By following the four-step model set out in this paper, departments can help ensure that collaboration gradually becomes established in the culture of LIS in the region, and that familiarity breeds trust. In this way, knowledge, expertise and resources can be shared in the interests of the LIS profession as a whole and of the Gulf region and its countries.

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## Annex A – Interview Guide

1. First, how would you personally define regional collaboration in LIS?
2. Can you think of any examples from other parts of the world in which regional collaboration generates benefits for participants? Please briefly describe these.
3. Thinking now of your own LIS department, what linkages or collaborative activities exist, if any, with other LIS departments within the GCC States?
4. For any examples of linkages or collaboration mentioned, please explain:
  - a. The purpose of the collaboration
  - b. Who is involved
  - c. What the outcomes to date have been
  - d. What you see as the benefits
  - e. What you see as the drawbacks or difficulties of the collaboration
5. As well as the current linkages or collaborations already described, are you aware of any other collaborative activities that have taken place between LIS departments in the GCC States in the past, or are currently taking place between departments other than your own?
6. Repeat Question 4 for linkages/collaborations mention in response to 5., adding where appropriate:

For collaborations that have come to an end, what was the reason for their termination?
7. What are the main factors, in your view, influencing levels of collaboration in this region?

Probe as necessary: What are the main factors driving collaboration?  
What are the main barriers to collaboration?
8. How can any barriers to increased collaboration be overcome? Who would be responsible for this?
9. In your view, what would be the main benefits of increased collaboration between LIS departments in the Gulf Region?
10. Can you suggest any specific forms of collaboration that you believe should be implemented in the Gulf region? (please give reasons for your response)
11. Do you have any further comments relating to LIS collaboration in the Gulf region?

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**Biography**

Dr. Mohammed Nasser Al-Suqri is the Head of the Department of Information Studies, Collage of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University. He received his Ph.D. in Library and Information Management from Emporia State University, School of Library and Information Management, Emporia, USA; a Master's degree in Library and Information Science from Pratt Institute, School of Information and Library Science, New York, USA; and a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science from Sultan Qaboos University, Department of Library and Information Science, Sultanate of Oman.

Mohammed Nasser Al-Suqri conducts research in the area of user studies, Knowledge flow and sharing, Impact of New Technology on Academic Libraries, Digital Divide, digital libraries, and LIS education in the Middle East.

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