



Future librarians in Southern Africa: Case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

This paper is going to explore the education and training of librarians for the future in Zimbabwe. It is going to investigate the challenges of providing LIS education in a developing country like Zimbabwe. The paper will also highlight the impact of external factors on the education and training of Librarians in Zimbabwe. It will also assess the contributions made by technical colleges and universities in the professional development of librarianship. The paper will also attempt to find out the extent to which LIS departments in Zimbabwe have embraced I CT, Knowledge management and indigenous knowledge. The writer is going to briefly highlight the development of Library Education and training in Zimbabwe. The writer will explore the factors that affect education and training of LIS professionals in Zimbabwe. The writer will identify and describe the institutions that are offering LIS training and education in Southern Africa with specific reference to Zimbabwe. This paper will also highlight the significant developments that have taken place in curriculum development in Zimbabwe and explain how such developments have impacted on the education and training of librarians. The writer will also explore the extent of interdisciplinary and inter -institutional collaborations research in LIS institutions in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: curriculum development; library education and training; traditional knowledge

Introduction

Library and Information Science education and training in Africa has its background in colonialism which led to the establishment of libraries in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Ochola and Bothma note that Library and Information Science education in Africa can be traced as far back as 1960 even though in South Africa it started earlier in 1938.¹ The two authors further note that originally the main purpose of Library and Information Science Education was to

provide training and education for Librarians even though currently there has been a paradigm shift with emphasis on Knowledge Management , Records Management and Health Information Management among other areas of interest.² This has been as a result of the growing importance of information as an integral corporate resource. Van Aswegan states that the period 1938-2000 are renowned for having registered significant progress in the quantitative growth of Library and Information Science schools.³

Aina notes that formal training programmes for information specialists started in English-speaking Africa in the second half of the twentieth century, when the first librarianship course was started at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. Prior to this course , most trainees were prepared for the British Library Association Examinations.⁴ Musiker notes that Librarianship in South Africa can be traced to 1933 when the professional body South African Library Association (SALA) introduced correspondence courses following recommendations from the Carnegie Corporation.⁵ This responsibility was later in the 1960 abrogated to the University of South Africa .This contrasts sharply with the period from 2000 to 2006 marked by a notable decline from eighteen schools to eleven and this was attributed to the transformation of the education sector in South Africa with the merger of many Higher Education Institutions and a review of their sizes and shapes with reference to programmes /qualifications offered.

It should be noted that since the foundation of LIS Departments in Zimbabwe the needs of libraries have changed and this is a great challenge for those involved in the training of librarians.Shenton and Jackson note that since the focus of librarianship was moving towards information literacy and user education and this meant that library and information Science professionals needed to move up the value chain are seen to be doing more intellectual and developing synergies between educational practices and information literacy..⁶ He also notes that the aspect of storing, searching, exploiting and disseminating information has not changed. Davis note that professional librarians will always be needed “...skills possessed by qualified librarians should be valued and deployed effectively rather than to be regarded as an unfortunate overheard”⁷

Historical development of LIS training in Zimbabwe

Ocholla and Bothma note that in Southern Africa there is at least one LIS school in Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe and these schools are located within Higher Education Institutions or Universities. In Zimbabwe there are two schools of LIS namely the Harare Polytechnic and the National University of Science and Technology.⁸ These institutions of Higher Education help to ensure that curriculum development and quality control is closely monitored despite or in the presence of National Qualifications Authority like SAQA in the case of South Africa.

Powel notes that from independence until 1987, the only library training offered in the country was the City and Guilds of London Library Assistant's Certificate which was taught on a part-time basis at the Harare and in Bulawayo Polytechnic through the Matabeleland branch of the Zimbabwe Library Association.⁹ She further states that prior to this course the Government Library service provided an in-service course even though this was at a non-professional level. The Government Library Service and City and Guilds course provided Zimbabweans with an

opportunity to train for librarianship but the disadvantage was that with the former it fell short of producing professionals, while with the latter it was irrelevant to the information needs of a developing country like Zimbabwean noted that the training of librarians in Africa during the second half of the twentieth century was primarily based on a curriculum imported wholesale from the industrialized countries. The writer further notes that librarians can only make a meaningful contribution to the if a new and relevant system of training which prepares them for the challenges of Africa is developed .The lack of appropriate course resources and the low level nature of the City and Guilds course triggered the desire to establish a library school that would train professional librarians.¹⁰

Chinyemba notes that library training in Zimbabwe started in 1985 when the National Library and Documentation Services Act was enacted and promulgated to provide the legal basis for the development of libraries.¹¹Raju notes that during the pre-independence era most African Librarians in Zimbabwe trained abroad or engaged in distance education through the University of South Africa and overseas thus bringing with them western values and priorities in the African context .¹²When Libraries were established in the post independence era they followed British and American models, for example, academic LIS Courses were located in Universities while certificate and Diploma courses were located in no-universities like Polytechnics and other technical colleges. It was in the same year that the Department of Library and Information Science was set up after lobbying by the Education Committee of the Zimbabwe Library Association under the chair of Professor Made. At its inception the library school at Harare Polytechnic had been mandated to train manpower specifically for the envisaged National Library and Documentation Service.

Edward Dudley of the Polytechnic of North London was solicited by the Ministry of Education and Culture to carry out a feasibility study o the prospect of introducing a Full –time programme for the training of Librarians in Zimbabwe. He arrived in Zimbabwe on the 22nd.-30th.April, 1982.The terms of reference were widened to include the possibility of introducing a 3-4 year programme for librarians and information workers of all kinds including those who would work in culture houses.Kotei states that **The Dudley Report’s proposals** for the establishment of a full time course in Library and Information Science was well received by various stakeholders including the Government’s Ministry of Education Sports and Culture , Ministry of Labour Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Zimbabwe Library Association.¹³ Thorpe notes that the British council did provide immense support leading to the establishment of the first library school in Zimbabwe.¹⁴

INSTITUTIONS OFFERING LIS TRAINING IN ZIMBABWE

There are two main vocational and technical institutions offering LIS Education in Zimbabwe namely the Harare and Bulawayo Polytechnic. These institutions train students from the certificate level to the Higher National Diploma level and very soon they will be offering a Bachelor of Technology degree programme.In 2002 the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo began to offer an undergraduate and post graduate programmes in Library and Information Science. The LIS courses offered by Harare and Bulawayo Polytechnic are have a technical orientation since they are supposed to take students through basic library and

information science theory and practice to an advanced Bachelor of Technology and A Master of Technology in Information Science unlike the University course which takes students through the Bachelor of Science Honours to the Master of Science in Library and Information Science. These institutions provide qualifications models that are vocational and academic but at the same time being inclined toward the socio-economic realities of Zimbabwe as a developing country.

IMPACT OF CHANGE ON LIS EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

Feather and Mann noted that throughout the world education for librarianship is in a state of constant flux, for example, LIS has lost its original identity.¹⁵ Similarly, Minish –Majanja point out that there are common developments in the growth of Library and Information Schools, and these include, review and revision of curricula, decrease or increase of student numbers, relocation of the administration of LIS schools and expansion and closure.¹⁶ In Zimbabwe the most significant trend has been the review and revision of LIS curricula, increase in student numbers and the expansion of LIS education. Ocholla notes the drastic decrease of LIS schools from eighteen to the current eleven as reflected by the closure of some schools in South Africa during the last ten (10) years.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that in Zimbabwe the number of LIS Schools has actually increased from one in 1985 to four, namely Harare and Bulawayo Polytechnic, National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).

CURRICULUM REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

Feather and Mann go on to say that educational objectives can only be achieved through the design of an appropriate curriculum and its effective delivery by appropriate methods. The redefinition of LIS role has led to continuous curriculum changes.¹⁸ The direction, pace and foci of this change has varied from country to country. Ashabai Chinyemba notes that the process of curriculum review is an all inclusive affair which requires inputs from various stakeholders of Library and Information Science industry.¹⁹ Curriculum refers to the structured and unstructured activities that take place within the aegis of the learning environment, for example, the course outline, resources available, and the environment in which the learning is taking place. Abidi notes that curriculum issues of LIS education should be considered in the context of the needs of the profession, employment market, trends in research and development, status of Information science status, special responsibilities of LIS training schools in developing countries, globalization, Information and Communication Technology and the general socio-economic context.²⁰

Stuert noted that the traditional approaches to development of a core curriculum in LIS has emphasized more on providing students with professional skills in cataloguing, reference moving towards and bibliographic search skills and professional values.²¹ Sturges note that LIS Education has shifted from a collection dominated profession to content based –tendency characterized by accessing and filtering content, intermediation between user and technology, negotiating ethical and regulatory difficulties, user oriented services, managing knowledge resources, and creating value added packages.²² Lee and Chuang have identified four trends that impact on LIS curriculum namely; developments in ICT, lifelong learning, emphasis on theory and research in

course content.²³The impact of ICT 's in the education and training of librarians is critical because technology permeates every aspect of life in the Information industry.

In Zimbabwe Polytechnics falls under the direct control of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education's Curriculum Research and Development Unit(CRADU).CRADU is part of the Higher Examinations Council (HEXCO) which responsible for all the courses that are offered by the two polytechnics namely Bulawayo and Harare. The same body regulates all syllabi review. Feather and Mann have also noted that where a central authority determines the curriculum as is the case in developing countries, this leaves little room for any maneuver and change can be a long and tedious process subject to bureaucratic indifferences and unpredictable political whims. The curriculum offered by the two Polytechnics in Harare has undergone review less than five times since the inception of the course in 1985.

This proportion is inadequate if the syllabi is continue being relevant and aligned to the dynamism of industry and technological trends. On the contrary, where a decentralized authority determines the curriculum, there is ample room for maneuver and regular change of the syllabi to suit current societal needs. Under normal circumstances the Curriculum Research and Advisory unit should convene a workshop to review syllabuses whenever signals are received. However, due to various constraints like inadequacy of resources, this does not happen and it may usually take even years to positively respond to such signals.

These reviews led by experts who will work together with a broad spectrum of library professionals who have a stake in the training of librarians. The deliberations of a curriculum review workshop are then captured by a designated official from CRADU who will then write a report in line with the technical requirements of Higher Education Examination Council. Curriculum review affords institutions of higher learning to identify areas superseded by time and practice and then replace them with new areas of interest to the profession, for example, the introduction of Information Technology, Database analysis and design, data communication and networks and Knowledge Management.

On the other hand Universities enjoy greater autonomy unlike vocational institutions whose curriculum is determined by centralized institutions like Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO). Universities in Zimbabwe like the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) are able to review their curriculum more often provided resources are available. Similarly the ability of technical institutions to undertake a curriculum review is also dependent upon the availability of human and material resources. Generally LIS curricula in Zimbabwe's vocational and academic institutions are in sync with current trends in Information and Communication Technology.

MODELS FOR TRAINING IN LIS

Library and Information Science in Zimbabwe is offered on a full time and part-time and block release basis as well as through distance education. The LIS courses are taught through a contact teaching mode at the Polytechnics and at the National University of Science and Technology, while the Open University relies on distant teaching. The later is a new innovation being offered by the Zimbabwe Open University. The Harare and Bulawayo Polytechnic and the National

University of Science and Technology (NUST) offer LIS training on a full and part-time basis as well as on block release. The courses offered by the Polytechnics start from a National Certificate, followed by a Diploma and Higher Diploma which leads to Bachelor of Technology, followed by a Master of Technology and finally a Doctor of Technology.

Ochola notes that in South Africa there are two dominant learning models of librarianship qualification, basically, the undergraduate model and the post graduate model and. Zimbabwe follows a similar pattern.²⁴ The undergraduate degree programme consists of a four programme covering a broad spectrum of LIS subjects combined with a number of electives from other areas like Records Management and Information Science and Information and Communication Technology. These programmes lead to an Honours degree programme which can also enable one to proceed to a Masters of Science, and then a Doctorate. In the post graduate model one the conditions for admission are that one needs to have acquired any relevant degree.

Snyman noted that there the non-library sector is a growing market for LIS job opportunities and this has forced many LIS schools to adapt a survivalist strategy of reorienting their curriculum to the new market and this prepares LIS graduates to work in any information related field.²⁵ Ochola states that initially LIS Schools in Southern Africa have shifted from mainly focusing on training of librarians to work in libraries because libraries are not expanding, while existing ones are unable to offer new employment, lack of financial resources and the fact that libraries are facing stiff competition from technology driven services like the internet, wireless technology whose proximity to the information seekers and relevance of content threatens library usage.²⁶ In Zimbabwe the hyperinflationary environment has affected libraries to the extent that the opening up new posts in Universities has gone down, even though government offers for jobs in government libraries has remained static.

Challenges of training Future Librarians in Zimbabwe.

The training of future librarians in Zimbabwe faces many challenges ranging from technology transfer, information explosion, globalization, brain drain, technology transfer, collaboration and partnership, funding, and research development among other factors. The twenty first century requires Librarians who are techno-savvy because it is an age driven by Information and communication technologies where knowledge and skills in use of open access and social networking tools wikis, blogs, RSS feeds among other social media will be critical if library schools in Zimbabwe are going to produce experts with the intellectual acumen to reposition the country in the new technology-based information society. Zimbabwe, like any other emerging economies face e-Inclusion challenges like inadequate technology infrastructure, for example, low connectivity densities, electricity problems and computer equipment necessary to support the integration of ICTs in LIS training for the future.

“...Sub-Saharan Africa is in the mainstream of ICT exploitation and consumption, even if somewhat lagging behind. ... the LIS environment in much of sub-Saharan Africa is still basically traditional, but becoming more and more ICT-driven following trends in the rest of the world. The education and training of LIS professionals, their needs and their potential, empowers them to unleash the potential and the sophistication of technology...”²⁷

Chinyemba notes that the greatest challenge faced by trainers in the twenty –first century is unemployment resulting from the shift from wage based economy to one of self reliance and entrepreneurship. He further states that the training of librarians should respond to such challenges by shifting towards training for self reliance and job creation.²⁸ Ghosh echoes similar sentiments by stating that the current information society creates 'endless opportunities and niches' for inforpreneurs or information brokers who commercialise their services in the accurate, timeous and systematic provision of information to users.²⁹ This scenario has forced the Library and Information Science Schools to offer a curriculum that incorporates knowledge and skills that are in demand in industry, for example, Records Management, Information Brokerage and Consultancy, Archival Administration, Knowledge Management and Information Technology among other subjects.

The demand for Records Management officers was triggered by the Government of Zimbabwe's Public service which professionalized Records Management resulting in new opportunities for graduates with qualifications in Records Management and Library and Information Science. Snyman notes that there are a number of ways to determine LIS market needs and these include newspaper scanning for skills, knowledge and attitudes required by LIS jobs, follow-up and tracing studies of graduates, focus group discussions through committees made up of participants from LIS schools, industry and commerce, consultations and of-course reading of relevant literature.³⁰ Non-LIS opportunities require excellent knowledge and skills in information literacy, knowledge management and ICT's,

The other challenge being faced by LIS Institutions of higher education and training include the need to make the curriculum relevant to local needs. Rosenberg notes that the need to indigenize the curricula and to make it relevant to local African needs in Southern Africa dates back to the second half of the twentieth century even though this has been an uphill struggle.³¹ African Library schools in their endeavor to maintain international professional standards in the provision of LIS training and education have been forced to maintain the curriculum content from the west because of lack of teaching and learning materials relevant to library and Information work in Africa. Okolie notes that African scholars in LIS need to contribute towards knowledge production for sustainable African development which will result for African centered Higher Education where African ideas, knowledge and ways of knowing are affirmed and promoted.³² Many African countries have begun to promote scholarly publishing of research relevant to local situations.

The other challenge for LIS Schools in Africa is the area of knowledge management which is now viewed as relevant or critical in international development work according to Johnson.³³ The author notes that Knowledge management can contribute immensely towards capturing and disseminating indigenous or traditional knowledge as well as spreading new production processes, facilitating independent learning and promoting socio –economic progress in Africa.³⁴ In Zimbabwe LIS educational and training institutions need to make steps towards embracing KM by either offering it as an independent discipline or by incorporating it within LIS Curriculum. It is pleasing to note that progress in the incorporation of KM in the LIS curriculum has already been made with both Polytechnics and the Universities offering either pure KM Modules or Information Management related subjects. KM is critical in LIS education and

training and hopefully this will catapult African economies into the Information driven economies of the twenty –first century.

Some of the mentioned challenges may be addressed through inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional research and collaboration in the region and externally. These collaborations can focus such areas as indigenous knowledge systems, knowledge management and the application of ICTs including information literacy among other areas of concern. At the same time LIS schools in Zimbabwe should embrace the opportunities provided by ICTs in teaching and learning, for example, in the development of ideal market-oriented curricula, obtaining of relevant, current educational technologies and resources, and the application of state-of-the-art educational methods and techniques such e-learning and computer-aided instruction. The Harare Polytechnic, through its College Information Technology Enhancement Programme (CITEP) has already embarked on implementation of e-learning project using Moodle and includes capacity building and support.. This is a positive step in line with aspirations of the future in education and training.

CONCLUSIONS

Thapisa notes that there is need to invest in LIS education that is more market driven, technopereneural in approach and competency based so that the graduates who are produced will be adequately equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to tackle job related problems as well as other socio-economic challenges that Zimbabwe currently faces.³⁵ The training of LIS professionals in Zimbabwe faces many challenges professionally technologically and economically but through proper strategic planning there is growing confidence and optimism that the country will continue to produce quality graduates who will contribute to the socio-economic development of Southern Africa. At present most LIS graduate trained by the institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe have secured employment in public and private institutions, for example in government and non-governmental organisations, Universities , schools and industries locally and within the Southern African region. LIS will continue to be an indispensable tool critical for the socio-economic turn around of the economy because Information is the first front in the fight against poverty, ignorance and underdevelopment.

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