

CHANGING TRENDS IN TRAINING NEEDS FOR INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper puts into historical perspective the changing trends in the training of information professionals in Kenya since 1970. Issues and trends are discussed on the basis of a literature review representative of popular publications and research reports from 1970 to the current time. This paper is adapted from a chapter on such research completed by the authors. The information reflected herein will be helpful for comparative studies on Library and Information Studies (LIS) education in Africa. The paper concludes that core knowledge and skills for information providers ought to be reviewed regularly and that support from LIS education dispensation stakeholders, such as a national library associations and national experts, should be enlisted in determining such requisite skills

INTRODUCTION

Professional education in library and information studies in Kenya attracted a great deal of attention in the last decades of the twentieth century and continues to do so even today. The aim of this paper is to present a historical perspective on the changing trends and debates regarding the training of information professionals in Kenya. The paper will cover five periods: the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, as well as present trends, and a future forecast.

The need for trained manpower in Kenya can be traced to the 1950's when the then Royal Technical College (now University of Nairobi) was established. The College provided employees with in-service training in basic library skills. Later, the City and Guilds (a UK based correspondence education programme) started offering library courses through correspondence. These courses led to the award of certificates in Librarianship. Library employees were encouraged to take United Kingdom correspondence courses organized by the British Library Association (BLA).

As libraries in East Africa developed, it became apparent that highly trained personnel at the senior professional levels were needed. In 1964, therefore, the East African School of Librarianship (EASL) was established at Makerere University in Uganda as a regional school. The school offered non-professional library assistant certificates and much later, diploma and postgraduate courses. This school (now the East African School of Library and Information Science) largely serves the human resource needs of Uganda. Kenya has established five main Library and Information Science/studies (LIS) tertiary institutions in the country (see appendix). An overview

of their curriculum has been provided by Ocholla (1995), including within the African context (Ocholla, 2000).

1970s

In 1971, at a meeting in Addis Ababa, East African Members of the Standing Conference of African University Librarians (SCAULEA) expressed concern for the first time over the problem of the lack of local institutions offering library education. They agreed to invite John Dean to conduct a study, prepare a preliminary report on a regional graduate library science program for the English Speaking SCAULEA countries, and to propose a curriculum.

The Dean report (1974) revealed a need for personnel educated at the postgraduate level to provide high-calibre leadership, specialized expertise, an incisive appreciation of local problems and research competence in the profession. It observed that it is better to provide basic professional education at home, that is, professional education at the undergraduate levels. It recommended the establishment of broad-based postgraduate courses as opposed to narrow specialization and suggested that emphasis should be placed on the following four knowledge areas:

- subject knowledge, e.g. sociology, psychology, management and systems analysis
- core subjects in library/information studies, e.g. foundation studies, bibliographies, library management and operation studies
- electives in library/information studies, e.g. user behaviour, service to neo-literate and comparative librarianship, library cooperation, audio-visual aids and reprography
- practical experience involving supervised practical work in an appropriate library.

A balance between predominantly generalist units and those of a more specialized nature was recommended. The report, however, did not provide a comprehensive outline of course units that could be incorporated in the curricula. The report further noted that training in archive administration was not a priority area since it was not an area of need. In addition, archives and records management was not regarded as an area of need at that time. What resulted from the report in terms of implementation is not clearly documented. Whatever could be applied as a result of this report, if used at all, was implemented haphazardly.

UNESCO (1974) developed the concept of harmonization as a basis for the training of information professionals. The concept was based on the premise that:

there are areas of knowledge and skills common to all the information sciences and this creates a common base for education and training and allows graduates flexibility in their future choice of careers (UNESCO, 1974:2).

The concept became widely acceptable to most countries formulating curricula that related to all the information professions. With time, however, discussions emerged as to what should form the core of the curricula in the information sciences. Opinion seemed to be split on this issue and this lack of consensus triggered a wide-ranging controversy on this issue, both at national and international levels. In Kenya, where there was no local training institution, an attempt to establish one was preceded by

research and consultation.

In 1974, the Kenya Library Association (KLA) appointed an education sub-committee to study the need for manpower in the library/information sciences in Kenya. One of the purposes was, among others, to recommend methods and content for training. The result was the Osundwa report (1975) that noted the increasing importance of audio-visual media and that recommended the introduction of new courses in this area, alongside library user education and school librarianship.

In 1975, another KLA sub-committee was appointed to analyze various courses of study in the field of documentation and information for different categories and levels of trainees. The committee, basing its conclusions on the Kempe report (1976), recommended a course of study that offered a broad base of library principles and techniques with a specialization in information work. It further suggested that trainees or entrants should be subject graduates because trainees would have to set up or re-organize the necessary services, libraries and documentation collections before they could operate satisfactory information services. Subject knowledge was considered essential for professionals to be able to organize collections.

This committee's findings supported Dean's earlier recommendation for the mounting of long-term manpower surveys to identify priority needs as a necessity. In addition, they supported his (Dean's) view that personnel should be trained at the postgraduate level and suggested the linking of courses to the needs and the orientation of participants, especially information work. However, there is no clear evidence to suggest that these two studies influenced the curriculum of the para-professional training programme begun at the Kenya Polytechnic through the initiative of UNESCO in July 1974 to provide a library assistants' certificate course.

It must be noted here that no establishment of a school or curricula directly resulted from these studies conducted in the 1970s. It is not easy, therefore, to assess the impact they had on training needs, even though it should be appreciated that their main focus was on quantitative manpower needs.

1980s

This period witnessed an attempt to define and articulate competencies needed for LIS.

King Research Inc. (1983) provided an insight into the then current and future competency requirements of library and information professionals. With a broad scope, and taking into account world trends, the study covered a cross-section of all the information professions.

The study resulted in a set of training requirements for the work place. Those considered important were:

- library operation
- organizing techniques
- management
- supervisory techniques
- statistical and quantitative skills

The study noted that the following needs were not as frequently mentioned as might be expected:

- dissemination
- public relations
- communication
- evaluation

The results of this study were widely used in designing curricula for library schools in the United States in the 1980s.

In addition, Seeger (1983) proposed in a focused way that programs in information work for agricultural librarians should be categorized into two major groups, a conventional library-oriented program and a broad program directed towards new technologies, databases, information retrieval, and communication. This was a shift away from an institutional view to a general information problem. He queried the amount, depth and the structure of subject knowledge in relation to information work and then defined the categories as follows:

- General Profiles-includes knowledge of subject, methods, technology, environment and attitude;
- Specific Profiles-includes knowledge of agriculture related to developing countries, information handling/acquisition, tools, equipment, computer, online systems, population/infrastructure, regional needs, understanding, task-driven and decision- oriented activities.

Bell (1983) suggested that information professionals should be computer literate in indexing, cataloging and general library operations, in addition to online systems. He argued that the fugitive nature of agricultural literature necessitates equipping the students with all possible methods to trace it.

Ojiambo (1983) pointed out that training should not be highly academic and theoretical since for a developing country such as Kenya, the priority and challenges for professionals constitute the management of the already existing information infrastructure. He observed that newly qualified graduates may be appointed to such positions of responsibility as starting a new library from scratch, being in charge of a section or department of a large system, or even in the planning and managing an information system. His views ended with concrete proposals for a curriculum that takes into account not only local needs but also world trends.

Even at that time, however, there were those whose emphasis was on specialization rather than generalization. For instance, Ng'ang'a (1985a) argued that information professionals must have a subject base or specialization.

Seeger (1983) countered that this need depended on the subject, type of information system, function, or the purpose of the information system and the target group. He proposed innovative ideas versus intellectual cataloging and supposed that since certain specific cataloging skills are never needed in practice, there is no need to go into unnecessary details in training. During the same period, Ng'ang'a (1985b) echoed the call for harmonization of training. He pointed out that the education and training of information scientists should be conceived of and treated in a holistic manner instead of on a piecemeal basis. He observed that archivists, librarians and information scientists ought to see themselves as information workers who are working in complementary fields and not as competitors. The basic agreement was that a general competency in all areas would be desirable in the future as opposed to narrow specialization. Evidence of contradictions in these opposing viewpoints suggests glaring uncertainty among some local experts.

Amman (1985) stressed the need to link technology related to libraries, media and computer science. He foresaw a situation in which the librarian of today would become the information specialist of the future. His views were supported by technical developments such as increased computer usage and the decreased cost of microprocessors. He proposed Information Technology (IT) training mainly in:

- communication technologies
- satellite communication
- telecommunications
- databases

Ojiambo (1985) placed emphasis on orienting a program towards the practical ability of the graduate. Nyamulu (1987), while supporting Bell (1985), pointed out that training should emphasize computer knowledge in order to attain accuracy, efficiency, new services and co-operative ventures. By 1987, the importance of computer knowledge was already evident in a myriad of automation and networking activities among institutions like the International Laboratory for Research in Animal Diseases (ILRAD), the International Center of Insects Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) and the International Center for Research in Agro-Forestry (ICRAF).

Abidi (1987), taking into account the information explosion, proposed increased emphasis on teaching information science. He suggested that professionals should endeavor to make a conscious effort to understand the nature of information and that training should address specific Kenyan needs such as:

- rural areas
- new developments
- illiteracy
- oral tradition
- economic development

Abidi furthermore argued for the introduction of regional priorities and options, while dismissing the suggestion of a standard curriculum. Abidi proposed the following knowledge bases as priority areas for Africa: good social attachment, educational experience, traditional methods of information control, automation, information needs, practical training aimed at addressing responsibilities, and continuing educational activities. Ojiambo (1983) expressed similar sentiments.

Other areas cited as important by Abidi (1987) included manpower for the book industry (to avoid dependence on donations), archives (historical reasons) and records management, research and rural areas' information needs. Abidi makes the following observation:

a number of courses, which should be rated too low on a priority scale, do appear, making the syllabi unnecessarily demanding (Abidi, 1987:47).

He goes on to suggest the following as compulsory areas of study for all information professionals: library and community, African literature, African bibliography, media resources and records management and archives. He views emphasis on information technology in a curriculum as a basic need.

The Rosenberg report (Rosenberg, 1989) constituted the first comprehensive study on training needs carried out and implemented in Kenya. The aim was to enable the Faculty of Information Sciences (FIS), at Moi University, to identify the type, nature

and range of information- handling skills needed in Kenya. The objective was to enable the Faculty to match curricula content with the required professional competencies.

The report correlated two groups of training areas, shared and specific to certain categories of information professionals within the whole profession. The four broad categories of professions identified were archivists and records managers, librarians/document lists, information scientists/officers and publishers, booksellers and, printers.

Shared training needs were defined as those that all types of employers required, irrespective of job title and emphasized. These covered activities such as acquiring, organizing, updating, repackaging and disseminating information. Also included were the ability to design, publish and print, analyze and provide writing and the production of information in print and in the audio-visual media.

The report noted that library/information science jobs involved other activities in related disciplines that would call for training both in knowledge skills and attitudes. They were, for instance, expected to be knowledgeable in record management, audio-visuals, printing, publishing and public relations. In addition, a positive attitude toward work, practical experience, the ability to set up a computerized databases, retrieval, capabilities, communication skills, computers skills, telecommunications knowledge, subject knowledge and knowledge of languages (other than English) were singled out as important to the profession.

It concluded that there was a commonality of information skills and that many jobs, especially in the expanding markets, required applicants with a variety of competencies. This conclusion was in agreement with the concept of harmonization proposed earlier by UNESCO.

The Rosenberg study also revealed a lack of general awareness regarding what competencies and educational skills that the information sciences would produce. It therefore recommended increased publicizing education for information professionals.

The Rosenberg study's findings and recommendations helped in the design of curricula for the FIS at Moi University. It is instructive that this is the only study whose report has been used as a basis for setting up a library school, LIS programme and curricula. The establishment of the FIS at Moi University is significant for the information profession in Kenya in two ways:

- it is the only school in Kenya that is the result of extensive research, study and consultation.
- It is the only school whose curriculum exposes trainees to competencies in all information professions.

1990s

This was a period of consolidation. In 1990, the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) together with the Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) held a seminar on "Coordination of Information Systems and Services in Kenya." Diana Rosenberg (1990) presented a paper on "Coordination in Training for Self-sufficiency of Information Personnel in Kenya".

In this paper, she agreed with Shinebourne (1989) that if a professional education develops the knowledge and ability to make judgments concerning any kind of information systems, and analytical and design skills to use information technology directly, then such an education is befitting for a variety of professions concerned with information handling. She cautioned, however, that each country should be left to decide on the professional areas to which information education and training must be directed.

She emphasized that curricula must not be based on current needs only, ignoring the future. Citing the classification of curriculum content as suggested by Abidi (1987), she concurred that curriculum content should be as follows: near future requirements, seventy percent; present day needs, twenty percent; and future development forecast ten percent.

Roper and Mayfield (1993), in a study commissioned by the Malawian Library Association (MLA) set out to determine what health information professionals do. The purpose was to determine present needs and those that will be required in the twenty first century.

The results found the following to be most important competencies in the late twentieth century:

- oral and written communication
- health science practitioners needs
- interpersonal relations
- health science information sources
- retrieval techniques
- planning
- selection of information sources
- computer software
- methods of information delivery
- information needs assessment

Out of these ten areas, seven were considered important in the twenty first century. Other areas considered important in the twenty first century included:

- budgeting
- telecommunication
- networking
- health services environment

A study carried out by Rosenberg (1994) on the FIS curriculum review was directed towards enhancing the content of the Bachelor of Science in Information Sciences at Moi University and attempted to determine what additional competencies were required. The Rosenberg report (1994) revealed that core courses in FIS were most highly valued by LIS students and least valued by both archive and records management (ARM) and publishing and book trade (PBT) students. The core was thought to be library oriented hence the dissatisfaction by students in other professions. The core, the report noted, was biased towards librarianship, and, the courses cited above would therefore be of value to students.

The report noted that the following subject areas needed more courses:

- computer courses

- software storage and retrieval
- publishing and media
- computer programming
- foreign language
- journalism
- newspaper and magazine publishing

The inclusion of computer, management, human communication and information society courses was found to be useful. Areas not adequately covered that were largely skill oriented included teaching skills, desktop publishing, as well as programming, typing, language control, writing and editing skills, office management, financial management skills and public relations.

Overall, general knowledge was perceived as impressive. Except in the case of library science (LS) majors, students thought their electives should be taught earlier. It was observed that knowledge gained through core courses had not been found very useful except by LS students, hence the need to make the core smaller and more focussed than in the existing curriculum. The core, the report noted, should include training in:

- communication of information
- computers and their applications
- information storage and retrieval
- language skills
- management
- marketing and public relations
- media technology
- office management

The findings of this study have since been implemented in the way of restructuring of the FIS curriculum.

The salient issues of LIS education in Kenya during this period are widely reviewed by Ocholla (1995), including issues and trends affecting professional training, curricula, exploitation of IT, collection management and supply and demand in relationship to LIS human resource planning. In addition, Wamukoya's (1992) paper on the training of archivists in the 90's also presents relevant reading.

During the early part of the 1990's, the Ministry of Education, on recognizing the need for library and information science education and training, facilitated the development of curricula through the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). The curricula developed at KIE are at Craft, Diploma and Higher National Diploma levels. Any tertiary education institution that wishes to provide LIS education can adopt these curricula. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) conducts examination for certification centrally

Besides the KIE supported initiative, studies and debates by information professionals in Kenya during this period lacked forecasting. Not much literature or discussion on the future orientation of programs exists.

Current trends and issues

Present day discussions in the Kenyan LIS literature continue to center on conceptualization of types of library/information science education programmes to be

set up, re-orientation and curriculum review. For instance, Odini (1999) identifies the need for review of information training requirements, curriculum review, emphasis of practical work as opposed to theoretical knowledge, learners' attitudes to the profession and information service delivery as well as the promotion of continuing education activities.

The demand for competency in technology has led to the proliferation of training programs in information technology, leaving out other information areas. The Bachelor of Science in Information Technology offered by the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology is the most recent addition. The course is popular and is taught in conjunction with middle level colleges. The popularity of this programme demonstrates the increasing interest in IT in the country.

Basing on what has been discussed, there is a need for the development of new programmes and the need for curriculum review that comprises a strong component of information management and IT. At the same time, a harmonized programme with relevant core courses is essential for serving a wide range of information needs in the country. While technological knowledge is highly relevant in a civilized and urban-centric world, the majority of the information poor who unfortunately are not adequately served in Kenya, will succeed with the help of a 'general practitioner' with broad-based information services knowledge and skills. We do, however, recognize that management and information needs and information seeking courses will remain highly essential.

These authors caution that great care must be taken while making a demarcation between two factors, the urban and rural information needs, or information rich and information poor needs. Secondly, we need to distinguish between commercial information requirements and how they influence human resource development as opposed to the general or basic information service requirements. We are witnessing a growing interest in a course offered by the Institute for Management of Information Systems (IMIS), a United Kingdom affiliated private college popular in Kenya, that emphasizes the management of information systems that is taught in the business context. A strong component in accounting, financial management and quantitative techniques is included. The basis of training seems to be business oriented rather than for information provision as a service, although clear demarcation may be difficult to make.

It seems the library and information education Kenya is undergoing transformation. For instance, until quite recently there were no full-fledged programmes in IT such as Bachelor of Science in IT or an IMIS that have long existed in the developed world. It is only by defining this body of knowledge for the professional that the curriculum can be created to support its acquisition.

The future

It is evident from the preceding analysis that the information sciences constitute an evolving and dynamic field. There is much that needs to be accomplished for a comprehensive LIS education and training, and there is at present a healthy controversy as to what should constitute education in these areas.

Information professionals are being called upon every day to perform new tasks that formerly were unrelated to their job profile. The change, we believe, is a result of several factors the first being the increasing development and use of new technologies for information and knowledge management, and the second, the

multidisciplinary nature of information science and services requiring regular diagnosis and revision. A third factor is the complexity and diversity of the user. We are tempted to ignore the latter factor in a country such as Kenya because market/survival forces tilt us towards the information rich while the lack of government subsidy and support for the infrastructure pulls the service backwards and separates the information rich from the majority, i.e., the information poor further apart. This puts the curriculum at the crossroads or on trial for morality.

From previous research by Shiholo (1999), on competency requirements for the information profession in the twenty first century, findings indicate a high rating for competency in information technology and management. These includes knowledge of automation activities, networking, databases, online searching, and systems development among others. This century seems to be dominated by increasing influence of computer technology, and the management of information as a resource and as well as knowledge management.

The need for traditional library operational knowledge such as cataloguing and classification, though not considered to be useless, seems to be waning. A recent study by Ocholla (2001), however, revealed that these two LIS subjects are still quite necessary. Thus, if cataloguing and classification were seen in the light of the organization of knowledge, the development of information analysis, synthesis skills, and the knowledge of the collection as well as of information services (reference work) without a substitute or complementary courses, its demise would be a total error for LIS education.

Second, the study shows preference for general knowledge rather than knowledge required in specific LIS environments. This is because the differences in ratings of the competencies presented were not sharply divided as expected. No item on the list was thought to be irrelevant.

With respect to the emerging markets, information professionals should be able to compete favorably with graduates from business and management schools, computer firms and from other fields such as accounting, banking and finance. An ideal training for information professionals, according to Shiholo (1999) should therefore have a proper grounding in the following:

- information technologies
- communication theories
- financial skills
- information systems/management
- quantitative skills
- environmental knowledge
- information seeking and user interfaces

CONCLUSION

The foregoing chronology indicates that LIS education has been given special attention in Kenya. Initially, there was concern about the need to establish local LIS education and training institutions so as to avoid dependence on overseas LIS education. This bore fruit with the establishment of programs listed in the Appendix. Healthy debates on LIS curriculum development also bore fruit. The Moi University curriculum (Rosenberg 1989 and 1994) provided a foundation for the development and implementation of LIS curricula that can be emulated for future developments and reviews. A transition from a traditional library-based curriculum to one that is

LIS-based has been recognized and implemented. Information technology is now a landmark (as witnessed by Bachelor of Science in IT and IMIS programmes) in Information Sciences/Studies (IS) in the country. Lessons from the establishment and operation of these programmes could be shared with LIS schools to identify areas of collaboration and perhaps niche areas for each LIS school identified. It is most probable that a new competency study comprised of experts in the new fields in Kenya would produce technology-biased results. It is the belief of the authors that information technology, management and user oriented studies (information needs, seeking, interfacing, use and impact) will occupy a central place in LIS education in the country. The challenge is to transform the three to serve the majority, the information poor, in the country, i.e. the rural based, the illiterate, those isolated geographically, the physically disabled and the culturally discriminated against such as women and children and those undernourished with information because of religion, customs, and traditions, among factors. To accomplish this a lot of work for information providers. It requires re-skilling and attitudinal transformation and has to be fulfilled by the government and LIS schools and the library and information profession in the country. The government support that has brought the country's LIS education and profession to current level of development is highly essential.

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