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SHORT COMMUNICATION

A Comparative Analysis of Library and Information Science Master's Degree Programmes in Uganda and USA

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Abstract

In the wake of technological developments, taking a pragmatic approach towards continual library and information science (LIS) curricula revision becomes inevitable. This paper analyses the existing LIS curricula both in the United States of America (USA) and Uganda. Specific focus is on a comparison between the master's programme in library and information science (MLIS) at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA) and the master's programme in information science (MIS) at the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS), Makerere University (Uganda). Both programmes are aimed at training librarians and information professionals to meet society developmental needs. This paper does not only focus on an analysis of the courses being taught at GSLIS and EASLIS in USA and Uganda respectively but also proposes a model for effective LIS curriculum revision in Uganda in the changing job market.

Introduction

Today's environment is characterised by information explosion, technological developments, changes in the demand for service delivery by LIS professionals and increasing challenges in LIS education (Okello-Obura and Kigongo Bukenya, 2011; Okojie, 2013; Siddiqui and Walia, 2013). As a result, LIS schools across the globe have to compete in the job market, which calls for training of LIS professionals with a relevant set of competencies (Siddiqui and Walia, 2013). Hence, there is need to improve the existing LIS curricula both in the developed and the developing world in order to maintain the relevance of the LIS profession. A curriculum is considered as a guide to student activities and instructional procedures in realisation of educational objectives (Singh and Shahid, 2010). LIS curricula must be able to guide students towards meeting the requirements of the job market. This can be achieved by reviewing and revising LIS curricula continually.

This paper attempts to evaluate the LIS master's programmes at GSLIS in USA and EASLIS in Uganda respectively with the aim of proposing a model for effective LIS curricula revision for Uganda. The two schools were selected for study because the author has been exposed to both of them academically and thus has good potential of analysing the two programmes. The similarities between the two programmes in terms of the target group further motivated the choice of selection of schools. One of the outstanding schools with distinct LIS curricula is the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), University of Illinois. According to Hu (2013), GSLIS was ranked as the top LIS

School in USA. This is the school selected for discussion in this paper. The East African School of Library and Information Science (formerly the East African School of Librarianship (EASL) was established in 1963 at the then Makerere University College (now Makerere University). EASLIS is the only university offering postgraduate degree programme in LIS. Others offer the programme at the undergraduate level. As the only school that provides postgraduate education, EASLIS is the focal point of this discussion (alongside GSLIS) with particular focus on the master's curriculum. This is a literature-based study drawing from a pool of existing literature by experts in LIS education. The author's experience as a LIS educator at EASLIS as well as a doctoral student at GSLIS serves to inform this study. More still, the websites for the two schools were utilised to obtain factual information about the schools, including information about courses being taught.

A Comparison between the Master of Science in Library and Information Science at GSLIS and Master of Science in Information Science at EASLIS

GSLIS is one of the oldest graduate schools (founded in 1896) in the US, is located at the University of Illinois –Urbana Champaign and is at the forefront of LIS education in the country (GSLIS, 2015). The school's mission is to "lead the way in understanding the use of information in science, culture, society, commerce, and the diverse activities of our daily lives" (GSLIS, 2015). It offers a number of degree programmes including a PhD in Library and Information Science; Master of Science in Library and Information Science; Master of Science in Bioinformatics; Certificate of Advanced Study in Library and Information Science; Certificate of Advanced Study in Digital Libraries; Master of Science in Library and Information Science for media specialists in K-12 schools; and other degree specialisations (GSLIS, 2015). In addition to these programmes, GSLIS proposed the establishment of a Master of Science in Information Management following a proposed name change of the school to 'the School of Information Sciences' (GSLIS, 2015).

The master's programme at GSLIS dates back to 1926 (GSLIS, 2015) whereas the one at EASLIS started in 1997 (Makerere University, 2010). Interestingly, the programme at GSLIS is under continual revision where the curriculum review committee convenes every semester to review the programme whereas at EASLIS, the programme has only been revised twice since its inception and was to be revised for the third time in 2015. EASLIS could adopt continual review of its curricula as a best practice from GSLIS in order to maintain relevance of the programme in the current competitive professional environment.

The MLIS at GSLIS is offered on campus through face-to-face lectures or through an online option called Leep Online Learning (GSLIS, 2015), whereas the MIS at EASLIS is only offered as a full time day and evening on campus programme (EASLIS, 2015).

In terms of duration, the programme at GSLIS requires 40 hours of coursework (GSLIS, 2015) whereas the one at EASLIS has both Plan A and Plan B students of which plan A students are required to complete 60 credit hours of coursework and a dissertation that carries 10 credit hours while Plan B students are required to complete 60 coursework hours and a project worth 10 credit units (EASLIS, 2015). This means that the programme, at GSLIS can be completed in a shorter period of time than the one at EASLIS, thus giving the students a quick way to get into the job market with a good blend of skills and knowledge or to even pursue further studies at doctoral level.

The MLIS programme at GSLIS has only two core courses covered over two semesters (GSLIS, 2015) while the MIS at EASLIS has twelve core courses, five of which are done in the first semester, five in the second semester, and two in the third semester.

Tables 1 and 2 explicitly reveal that EASLIS offers way too many core courses compared to GSLIS. This implies that students at EASLIS are limited in terms of specialisation within the first two semesters and are simply mandated to pursue areas that may be of less interest to them.

In terms of elective courses, GSLIS offers over 40 courses found in a course catalogue, which students can pursue from the very first semester

(GSLIS, 2015). Alternatively, students at GSLIS can customise their studies to suit different areas of specialisations with suggested core and elective courses, along with details of experimental learning projects, professional associations as well as sample job titles (GSLIS, 2015). The table below shows professional areas of specialisation at GSLIS.

Table 1: Core Courses for MS. in LIS at GSLIS

Code	Core courses	Semester and credit hours
LIS 501	Information Organisation and Access	1st Sem (4 hrs)
LIS 502	Libraries, Information and Society	2nd Sem (2 or 4 hrs)

Table 2: Core courses for MSc. Info. Science at EASLIS

Code	Core courses1st Sem	Semester and credit hours
MSC7105	Information Gender and Society	1st Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7106	Knowledge Organisation and Management	1st Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7107	Information Technology for Library and Information services	1st Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7108	Information Systems Analysis	1st Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7109	Information Sources and services	1st Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7204	Management of Information Systems and Services	2nd Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7205	Information Systems Development and Applications	2nd Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7206	Technical and Scholarly Communication	2nd Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7207	Information Legislation and Policy	2nd Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7208	Info-Entrepreneurship	2nd Sem (3 hrs)
MSC7101	Research methods	3rdSem (3 hrs)
MSC8104	Bibliometrics	3rdSem (3 hrs)

At EASLIS, the master's programme provides for only 8 elective courses under four areas of specialisation from which students can choose only one elective course in the third semester (EASLIS, 2015) as seen in Tables 3 and 4. From the elective courses shown in Table 3, there is an implication that GSLIS students are able to tailor their study areas to meet their professional goals in terms of areas of specialisation, which is very different from EASLIS where students are limited to one area of specialisation and only in the third semester. This derails achievement of students' professional targets and goals and limits their creativity in the areas they may be most passionate about.

Table 3: Professional Areas of Specialisation at GSLIS

Area of Specialisation	No. of Core Courses	No. of Elective Courses	Experimental Projects
Research and Analysis: Business Research, Competitive Intelligence, Knowledge Management and Prospect Research	4	17	3
Archival Information Services	3	10	6
Data Management and Curation	3	14	6
Research and Information services	5	41	4
Information Organisation and Management	5	18	6
Digital Libraries and Asset Management	5	14	5

Table 4: Elective Courses for MSc. Info. Science at EASLIS

Area of Specialisation	Course Name	Credit Hours
Information Organisation	– Information Storage and Retrieval – Knowledge Organisation – Classification and Cataloguing	3 3
Records Management	– Record Management – Conservation and Preservation	3 3
Publishing and Printing Science	– Publishing Management and editing – Multimedia production	3 3
Information and the Community	– Social Informatics – Indigenous Knowledge Management Systems	3 3

Furthermore, the programme at GSLIS includes specific library subjects as well as a wide variety of IT related courses whereas the programme at EASLIS has less IT courses. With the profusion of information technologies in the professional environment, the EASLIS curriculum leaves a lot to be desired in terms of equipping its students with the required skills to operate and manage IT initiatives or projects in the job market. Introduction of courses such as Digital Archiving, Digital Preservation, Community Informatics, Digital Libraries, Information Modeling, E-Resources Management, Design Information Interfaces, Digital Media Ethics, Health Informatics, and Web Technology Techniques would be relevant for students at EASLIS in the era of digital technologies in the 21st Century.

In addition, widening the selection base of elective courses at EASLIS to include non-IT courses such as Project Management for LIS–Memory Media and Institutions, Administration and Use of Archival Materials, Community Archives, and Information Learning Spaces and Pedagogies, Management of Libraries and Information Centres, Literacy, Reading and Readers, Youth Services Community Engagement, and Business Information, would enable EASLIS students to a wider variety to choose from to suit their professional interests.

Despite the disparities in curriculum design in the two schools, GSLIS and EASLIS programmes have some courses in common such as Information Organisation, Information Storage and Retrieval, IT for LIS, Systems Analysis, Research Methods, Information Policy, Records and Information Management, and Conservation and Preservation. This shows that both schools are concerned with important aspects of managing information and promoting research. Both programmes require a research output as the final product where for GSLIS, students are required to write a thesis while EASLIS requires a dissertation.

Limitations of the Master of Science in Information Science Curriculum at EASLIS

There is a wide chasm between the two programmes in question due to the limitations inherent in delivery of MIS curriculum at EASLIS. These limitations include the following:

- *Lack of LIS curriculum specialists consultants*: According to Kigongo-Bukenya and Musoke (2011), Uganda has only one LIS curriculum consultant meaning that curriculum development and review work have been done on freelance experience. This is a problem for EASLIS because any revision done in the absence of such specialists may result in an unbalanced curriculum.
- *Infrequent revision of the curriculum*: EASLIS has revised its MSc. curriculum only twice since 1997 which is a reflection of inadequacy in responding to the changing professional environment. This affects the quality of LIS graduates who are often ill – prepared for the job market. A study carried out by Lutwama and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) reveals that 55% of LIS professionals in the job market were dissatisfied with EASLIS curriculum and called for its revision in light of the emerging information needs.
- *Limited knowledge of the job market*: Only one study has been carried out by Kigongo Bukenya and Lutwama in 2004 to trace EASLIS alumni 1995-1999 and establish the relevance of their knowledge and skills in the job market (Kigongo-Bukenya and Musoke, 2011). This means that the two times the master's curriculum has been revised at EASLIS, it was done with limited knowledge of the job market, thus missing out on invaluable changes to the curriculum.
- *Less involvement by professional associations*: According to Ocholla, Dorner and Britz (2013), there is less involvement of professional associations in LIS education in Africa and other developing regions largely due to lack of a legislative mandate. This can be said for Uganda where the Uganda Library and Information Association has interest in LIS curricula (Rugambwa, 2008) but has not been proactive in the revision of the LIS curricula which probably explains why the MIS has not been revised frequently.
- *Inadequate IT facilities/old technologies*: Okello-Obura and Kigongo (2011) observe that most LIS schools in Uganda are limited in terms of IT infrastructure. The same can be said for EASLIS and thus, affects delivery of the MIS curriculum. However, this problem may be overcome by sharing IT facilities available at the College of Computing and Information Sciences, Makerere University.

Proposed Model for Effective LIS Curricula Revision in Uganda

No doubt, highlighting the limitations of the MIS curriculum at EASLIS as seen above is essential for proposing a model for effective LIS curricula revamping in Uganda. There are several models and theories that have been related to LIS curriculum. Kigongo-Bukenya as cited in Kigongo-Bukenya and Musoke (2011) highlights three theories related to LIS curriculum including the Ecology Theory. These theories all emphasise working towards effectively responding to the changing environment. This is what is required for the LIS curricula in Uganda and thus a proposed model for effective LIS curricula revision in Uganda as seen in figure 1.

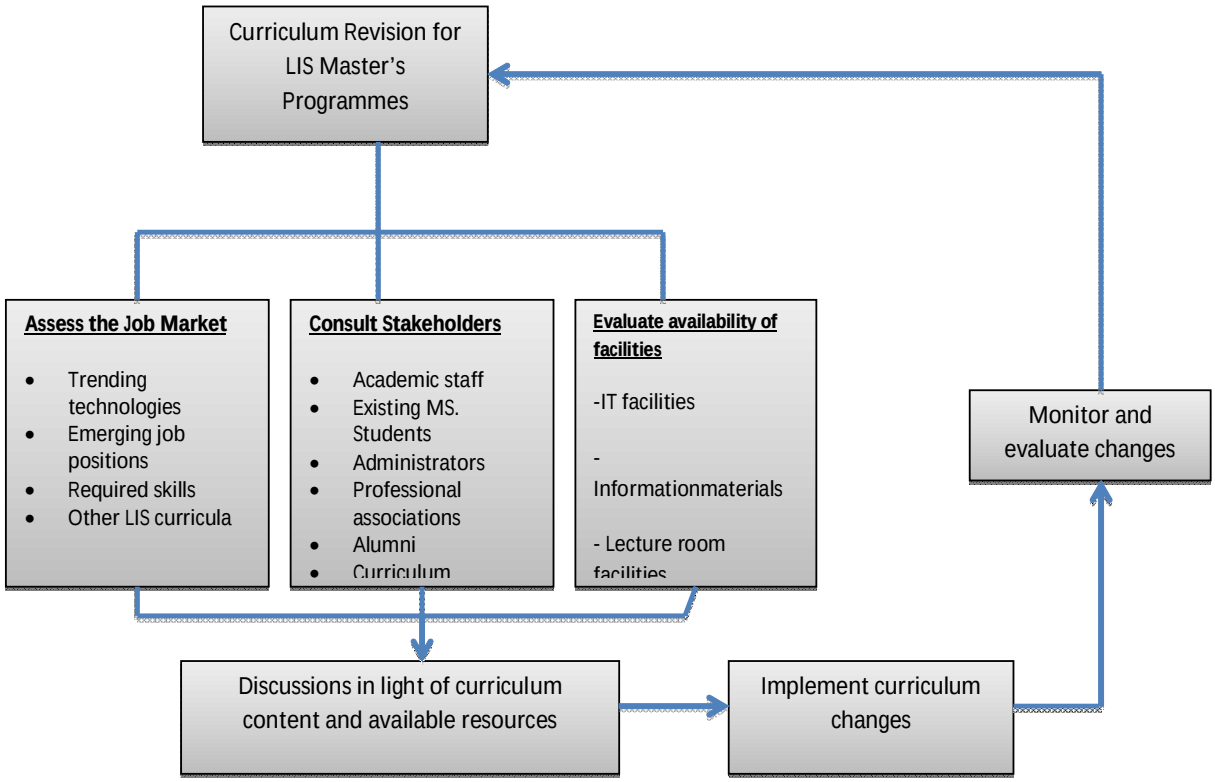

Figure 1: Proposed Model for Effective LIS Curricula Revision in Uganda

This model is based on three key facets that LIS schools in Uganda such as EASLIS should put into consideration when revising the LIS curricula. One of the key considerations is the job market. Knowing the job market in terms of the trending technologies is important in order to balance the technology focus when revising the curriculum. Wallace (2002) notes that knowledge of the job market is important in directing course content in the era of rapid technological developments. Other key issues to consider in the job market are emerging job titles/ positions, required skills in LIS jobs, and analysis of other LIS curricula. If revision of LIS curriculum is done without knowledge of the job market, it may exacerbate the existing situation and further create incoherence with the requirements of the changing LIS profession.

The second key facet in the model is consultation with stakeholders who should include academic staff, existing students, alumni, concerned administrators, professional associations, and curriculum consultants through workshops and meetings. Noll and Wilkins (2002) observe that such consultations are critical for curriculum development in the changing field of information systems. Without consulting key stakeholders, the resulting curricula may not reflect the professional goals of its target groups.

Third of the key facets is evaluating availability of facilities. It is important to consider availability of IT facilities, LIS information materials and lecture room facilities. LIS schools in Uganda where the lack of such facilities is ubiquitous may have to get necessary funding to solve this problem before revising the LIS curricula. Where such facilities are adequate, revision of the curricula should be done in line with the available facilities. For example, when introducing new technology courses, there should be enough software and hardware equipment to support teaching and learning.

The model described above should be followed with discussions in light of the curriculum three key facets content and available resources. Such discussions should be held by a selected curriculum committee that involves a LIS consultant/specialist and should focus on the courses to include the courses

to phase out or even the courses that require modification plus detailed the course content. After such discussions, changes can be implemented in the curriculum and communicated to the stakeholders. It is important to monitor and evaluate the changes to establish if revised curriculum meets its intended purpose. On the whole, LIS curricula in Uganda should be reviewed on a continual basis

Conclusion

LIS education has unceasingly changed face both in the developed and the developing countries. However, there is a widening chasm between the LIS curricula in developed and developing countries particularly as established in this paper between MLIS at GSLIS (USA) and the MIS at EASLIS (Uganda). Without meaningful restructuring of the MIS at EASLIS, a big gap will remain between the graduate students in USA and the postgraduate students in Uganda. Therefore, fundamental changes should be made to the curriculum at EASLIS to incorporate important modules meant to prepare LIS professionals for higher positions, enable them compete favourably with graduates from other parts of the world, and to meet the changing needs of the professional environment. However, change should not necessarily mean introducing only IT courses in the programme but rather take a holistic approach of revising the curriculum to include all courses that will keep the curriculum at the cutting edge in the LIS profession in the new age. It is thus important to realise that LIS curricula cannot be delivered as a single 'package' but rather require continual and constant revision to keep up with the changing times. This revision can be achieved by taking reformative and constructive steps such as those described in the proposed model in this paper in order to rectify and improve the existing LIS curricula in Uganda.

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