

Editorial Feature

The Changing Face of Library and Information Science Profession

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The field of what was once renowned as librarianship has evolved and significantly transformed from the 1940s through such nomenclatures as library studies, library/information science, information science, information management/knowledge management, and informatics. Through this transformation, archives and records management which was once a distinct discipline has progressively been integrated into the library/info disciplinary space. As a result of these transitions, librarianship has evolved to become a highly interdisciplinary infospace as reflected in the diversity of papers carried in this current issue of AJLAIS. Despite the transformation of librarianship into “new nomenclatural disciplines,” there remains an inextricable link between the umbilical cord of librarianship and the emergent ‘info’ disciplines.

This editorial feature is therefore devoted to the transformation of the field of librarianship to date. The transformation of librarianship over the years has been occasioned by many factors, but two stand out: the infusion of ICTs in virtually all library and information related training programmes and the changing needs of labour market characterised by new employment opportunities in business, industry and government. Many empirical studies support this thinking. For example, a tracer study conducted by Aina and Moahi (1999) in Botswana suggested the need to revamp library and information studies curriculum to address the new labour market needs. The study recommended a review and expansion of the scope of LIS academic programmes in order to produce a new breed of LIS professionals to take

advantage of the expanding job opportunities in all sectors of the Botswana economy. Such new breed of library and information professionals would manage the production, storage, sharing, utilisation and communication of knowledge within and out of organisations in the private and public sector. This change of focus in the training of LIS professionals may be explained by the fact that information is increasingly regarded as a factor of production, more important than traditional factors such as land, capital and labour. Many countries, especially in Asia, have often been cited as successful economic stories in part because of their prudence in transforming themselves into knowledge-based economies. There is also evidence emerging that globally, LIS programmes which have been slow in adapting to paradigm shifts in the information environments are experiencing declining enrolments.

The fact that librarianship has undergone significant paradigm shift since the 1980s is no longer a matter of empirical studies. Greater competition posed by the proliferation of information services that are not library based and the increasing use of information and communication technologies, especially personal computer, the Internet, electronic database, electronic data retrieval methods and the emphasis being placed on knowledge management are factors in the transformation of librarianship. The transformation of librarianship has in equal measure occasioned changes in the classic role of the librarian. The book keeping role has progressively evolved into information management role characterised by the librarian getting increasingly engaged in perfecting tools and procedures to enhance easy access to materials, creating portals, gateways, and hypertext links to resources. The librarians now serve as knowledge managers responsible for harnessing expertise of each other by working in teams, and mentoring junior colleagues. As information facilitators

in the information age, they are being called upon to help people to use resources, enhance outreach services to various users such as faculty, and work with users at the desktop to show them how to use databases. The librarians' role now includes information consultation where they work behind the scenes helping software designers to develop systems that fit into users' information seeking capabilities. They are also increasingly getting involved in developing and imparting information literacy. They are facilitators for providing effective search strategies, educators familiar with literature and information in many formats; and information intermediaries, responsible for providing current awareness services and liaison between the seeker of information and the information itself (Stueart, 2006).

The evolving roles of LIS professional has necessitated a wide range of new skill requirements such as information search skills; value adding skills (e.g. research skills, packaging information to support in decision making); IT skills; transferable and soft skills that are generic and cut across disciplines including: communication, management, leadership, teaching and training, teamwork; appropriate attitudes, values and personal traits; ability to handle change; continual learning and an entrepreneurial attitude; domain knowledge that is specific to the type of information service or organisation they are working in (Stueart, 2006). As a result of the transformation that has taken place in the nomenclature librarianship, it has given way to library and information science, which in turn has evolved into information science or information management in 1990s. The trend the world over is the recognition of information management field as inextricably intertwined with knowledge generation, sharing and application. This is based on the understanding that every aspect of information transformation process involves people who are constantly engaged in the generation, processing and exploitation of both tacit and explicit knowledge. Several library and information science programmes that were in the past known by such nomenclatures as librarianship, library and information studies, library science, library and information science or information science have now evolved into 'information management', 'knowledge management', 'information and knowledge

management' or 'informatics'.

The transformation in librarianship is increasingly being reflected in the curricula of LIS schools, as well as publishing outlets where library and information management professional journals such as: AJLAIS, Journal of Knowledge Management, International Journal of Information Management, South African Journal of Information Management, Libri, Information Development, Online Information Review, the Archivist, Archivaria, the electronic Library and other published articles that cover wide range of subjects on information and knowledge management rather than librarianship or archives and records management per se. Gorman (2003), is of the view that many topics regarded as central to library education, such as cataloguing, reference, collection development, are no longer central to or even required by today's LIS curricula. In its place are subjects such as user modelling, information visualisation, human computer interaction, business taxonomies, strategic intelligence, social and organisational informatics, e-commerce, computational linguistics, computer programming for information management, etc.

Crowley observes that in 1960, all library school programmes had 'library' in their titles. By 1986, 54.4% had both 'library and information' included in their names (Voos, 1985). In 1998, some schools had no longer the word, library, in their names at all. The name change has often been followed by curriculum changes as a tactic that has worked to attract students to the LIS academic programmes. Studies have shown that the broader the name, the more students that can be attracted. Crowley (1998) says the word 'library' has very negative connotations in the for-profit environment. Name change therefore tells potential students that the field of information science is not limited to librarianship and graduates can work anywhere, whether in library, corporate setting or government. The name changes reflect the breadth, depth and diversity of careers requiring information and knowledge management. The proposed Bachelor of Information and Knowledge Management (BIKM) programme in some library and information science schools is an innovative, modern and revamped curriculum.

Universities have since 1980s changed names of departments or programmes to reflect the dynamic nature of the information environment. In Africa,

some of the LIS schools that have specifically changed names of their information science programmes to information and Knowledge Management include: the University of Johannesburg, University of Stellenbosch, Durban University of Technology and University of Namibia. Similarly, changes have been reported in Poland (Sroka, 2002) and China (Chu, 2001). In China, there were over fifty schools of 'information management' in mid 1985 and by the end of 1990s, they changed their names to become variously known as 'schools of mass communications, knowledge and information management', 'information management and communication' or 'business administration'. In Japan, Takeuchi (1999) observes that only 3-4% of all qualified graduates find employment in libraries, with the remaining finding jobs in other fields. Takeuchi expressed the need to produce professionals who can function not only in library and information environments but also in designing, build and managing new digital information systems and services from human centred perspective.

Makiko (2006), in a study of trends and issues of LIS education in Asia, noted that the word 'library' is being eliminated from the names of LIS programs in order to attract students. Changes are occurring in core subject areas, with emphasis being placed on information/knowledge management. In addition, there are decreasing opportunities for new employment in library markets due to the over-production of LIS graduates. There is also a growing low interest amongst well-educated graduates in seeking employment opportunities in the public library market, which is perceived as offering relatively low social status and wage levels compared to national and academic libraries.

The impact of transformation of librarianship has had positive effects. For example, the LIS School at University of Ghana, Legon dropped the word, library, from its name followed by curriculum review. The change of name and curriculum has witnessed significant increase in enrolment year after year with applicants to the programme expecting to learn computer-based information management courses (Dazie, 2008). The name and curriculum change at the University of Johannesburg involved replacing "information science" with information and knowledge management. This change resulted in increase in enrolment with the department having

the largest number of students (estimated at over 600) compared to similar library schools in 12 universities in South Africa, (Du Toit et al., 2009). Ocholla (2009) notes that departmental name change occurs for many reasons. Among them are: amalgamation, absorption, disintegration, student attraction, growth, re-orientation, market demand, change of affiliation among others.

The transformation of librarianship profession has enhanced access and participation in higher education in LIS training because of diverse option and choices in academic programme offerings. Therefore, the current issue of AJLAIS focuses broadly on four themes: bibliometrics, information literacy, information behavior, ICT/knowledge management/local content and health informatics. These four themes in combination, demonstrate the need to determine the impact of paradigm shift in librarianship on scholarly output of knowledge, the need for new skills, emergent courses and academic programmes and how people are interacting with various ICTs in areas such as health.

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