Re-imagining a Social Justice Curricula and Scholarly Publishing in a Library and Information Science School in South Africa

Madeleine C. Fombad

University of South Africa

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Abstract

The Library and Information Science (LIS) profession is historically rooted in service-oriented ethics and philosophy and LIS researchers around the globe are exploring frameworks for integrating social justice in the LIS curriculum and research. Notwithstanding there is a dearth of research on this topic in South Africa. Deep-seated inequalities and systemic barriers such as high levels of illiteracy, high rates of crime, racial and gender inequalities, unemployment, poverty, race and inclusivity continue to plague the country amidst policies aimed at redressing the country's historic inequalities and injustices resulting from the legacy of apartheid. Also, the effects of the fourth industrial revolution, widespread environmental crises and global protests and actions have further heightened challenges to social justice in the country. A socially just LIS curriculum should prepare future professionals to advocate for equitable access, challenge systemic biases and create a positive change in the provision of information services. Adopting a qualitative approach, a narrative review and content analysis of documents, this essay explores the current state of social justice within the curricula and scholarly publications in a LIS school in School amidst the emerging global and national drive for curriculum transformation and to re-imagine a curricula that integrates social justice in pedagogy, research and extracurricular activities in LIS education and training in South Africa. The article adds to the body of literature advocating for social justice in LIS education from an African perspective. The article also informs the social justice perspective of curriculum transformation in institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

Keywords: library and information science, curricula, South Africa, social justice, scholarly publishing

Introduction

There is no unanimous definition of the term social justice. Barker (2013) defines social justice as an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protections, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits. Social justice has also been attributed to distributive justice, political, economic, educational health and cultural freedom. This essay adopts a definition that describes social justice as advocating and striving toward equality and equity for all humans in society for access to basic needs, voice, education, liveable wages, meaningful work, access to opportunities, information, services, resources and meaningful participation in decision making regardless of race/ethnicity, sexual identity/orientation (Atteberry-Ash et al. 2024).

Although conversations on prioritizing social justice for historically disadvantaged social groups in higher education, has loomed within the education policy discourse in many countries around the globe, these discussions to a large extend in South Africa has been wavering, often with different conflicting perspectives. While some scholars are skeptical postmodernist denialist of the tenability and desirability of universal principles, others have an uncritical, problem-solving orientation and are rather seeking quick-fix solutions and value free research in higher education. Notwithstanding, a significant group of scholars are committed to social justice research in education, as evidenced in the growing number of studies in the past fifteen years that have focussed on the ways in which inequalities are produced and reproduced by post-colonial education policies (Badat, 2020; Bosch, 2017; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Gewirtz, 1998; Heleta, 2016; Jansen, 2003; Mbembe, 2015; Mwaniki, 2012; Ngcobozi, 2015, Oxlund, 2016). Prioritizing social justice pedagogy in higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa will reshape and fundamentally prepare graduates to work in diverse settings, interact with society and handle social justice issues.

In response to policy frameworks and scholarly writings for a transformed curriculum in addressing social justice in the higher education landscape, this essay re-imagines a strategy for social justice in a Library and Information Science (LIS) curricula and scholarly publishing in a university in South Africa and advocates that Library and Information Science educators and researchers should champion the agenda of social justice curriculum reform and scholarly publishing.

Social justice concerns have long historical roots in the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession. According to the American Library Association (ALA, 2006, 2019), the principles of social justice are embedded within librarianship through its core principles of democracy, intellectual freedom, equity, social responsibility, and a commitment to positive change for the common good. ALA lists equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental values of the association and uses a social justice framework to position the organization

as a trusted, leading advocate for equitable access to library, supporting human rights and intellectual freedom.

Also, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2019) noted that libraries are, arguably, social justice institutions, committed to giving everyone the opportunity to learn, grow and develop through providing access to information and services to the community, particularly in the form of facilitating job and skills development.

To this end there has been a consistent and growing global trend in scholarly publications on social justice education in LIS as researchers are advocating the need to offer courses that are explicitly linked to social justice topics that will prepare future librarians for their intellectual and practical roles. Furthermore, significant strides have been made by LIS professionals around the world to integrate social justice in the curricula (Bonnici et al., 2012; Cooke & Sweeney, 2017; Jaeger, Shilton & Koepfler, 2016, Kumasi & Manlov, 2016; Mehra, Albright & Rioux, 2006; Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2009; Mehra, 2014, 2021; Mathuews, 2016; Mathiesen, 2015; Morales, Knowles & Bourg, 2014; Pyati, 2010, Rioux, Roberts & Noble, 2016; Singh & Rioux, 2021). A general exploration of online course descriptions at the 63 English-medium North American Library Association (ALA-accredited graduate LIS programs by Singh and Rioux (2021) revealed that 53 out of the 60 schools have some social justice in their curriculums. Pawley (2006) asserts that the traditional LIS curriculum taught in master's programs in North America transmits a knowledge inheritance that perpetuates white privilege and presents barriers to racial diversification in LIS. Therefore, teaching social justice in the LIS curriculum will result in holistic development and growth of future information professionals, transform their thinking and prepare them to be successful information professionals (Cooke, Sweeney & Noble, 2016).

South Africa higher education landscape and the social justice perspective in the transformation agenda

South Africa's unique history of social exclusion, deep structural, inequities segregated development and economic deprivation resulting from pre 1994 apartheid years looms thirty years after, thus providing a special context for understanding the issues of social justice. Apartheid created a racially segregated unequal and fragmented higher education whereby White students received quality support and education, while Black, Colored and Indian students were disadvantaged (Bitzer, 2009). The racial separation and the reinforcement of white supremacy meant that higher education institutions were intellectual, academic, linguistic and socioeconomic instruments with graduates either contributing to the needs of the apartheid state or being relegated to the "Bantustans".

The post-1994 experience for most South Africans is still poverty, unemployment, exclusion and inequality in relation to race, gender and location (Govender, 2016). South Africa remains one of the world's most unequal country and has been referred to as a country of two nations. One of these nations is White, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic disperse, has access to developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure, and the second and larger nation is Black and poor, with the worst affected being [Black] women in the rural areas, and the disabled (Mbeki, 1998). The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Development Plan, 2013) affirms that a divided country with poor-quality education for black people as some of the major challenges to its democracy. The South African Constitution, which is known as the most democratic in the in the world, seeks to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1996). The Constitution places a specific responsibility on higher education institutions to revere, defend and uphold the rights of all South Africans, thus ensuring social justice. Among the numerous policies that address the past imbalances in education are the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Higher Education Act, 1997), the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2001) and the NDP (2013).

A transformed curriculum has become fundamental in discourse on higher education institutions across the globe as national, political and students' protests have triggered renewed interest among scholars and practitioners to advocate for a social justice pedagogy. The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall national students protest in 2015 and 2016 in South Africa respectively raised renewed awareness of the structural injustices embedded in the education systems, resulting in pressure from South African higher education to transform and decolonize the Eurocentric orientation (Council on Higher Education, 2016). In the same vein, the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States has been a driving force behind multicultural curriculum reform and the recognition that the mainstream curriculum taught in the educational institutions intends to reflect Eurocentric biases that work to reproduce existing social hierarchies (Gay, 2000). One of the primary ways in which educators in the United States have worked to achieve the goals of social justice is through multicultural curriculum reform (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Institutions of higher learning in South Africa are caught up in the pressure for transformation and have made strides in transformation on a range of issues such as funding for students, academic staff diversity; the marginalized experiences of black female academic staff, the plight of workers and outsourcing; the forgotten experiences of disabled students; the experiences of firstgeneration black workingclass students who are the first in their family to come to university; the role of language as a symbolic representation of hegemonic cultures; epistemic racism; cultural alienation; the deeply contested

notions of higher education curricula as an "*institution*", that embodies Eurocentricity and alienating values and beliefs (Bosch, 2017; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Heleta, 2016; Jansen, 2003; Mbembe, 2015; Mwaniki, 2012; Ngcobozi, 2015; Oxlund 2016). The fourth industrial revolution, the prevalence of artificial intelligence and related technologies, and the sustainable development goals have further highlighted issues of social justice such as information access, information skills, digital literacy, ethics and inclusion.

Language is currently considered a critical component in the conceptualization and actualization of social justice of the curriculum in the country understandably so due to the historical context within which South Africa's higher education evolved and the fact that it still plays the role of privileging access to higher education for some (Dube, 2012; Mwaniki, 2012; Ngoepe & Saurombe, 2021). It stands to reason that language transformation will facilitate epistemological access through the mastering of disciplinary literacies. Notwithstanding, as conversations are ongoing on how to build tools and frameworks to incorporate transformation in institutions of higher learning, this essay advocates for a social justice perspective to the curriculum transformation agenda that goes beyond language marginalisation into examining ways of adopting social justice in the curriculum. The Department of Higher Education (DHET, 2015) reiterates the importance of designing modules in a way that addresses the critical challenges facing education in South Africa that emanate from the legacy of apartheid. Dube (2012) contextualized the degree of Africanization of the LIS curriculum in the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa and concluded that little is known about the inclusion of indigenous content, both explicitly and incidentally, into the LIS pedagogy. She advocates the need to plan, prioritise and popularise Africanization within the institution. Ngoepe and Saurombe (2021), utilizing the concept of Africanisation to analyze the integration of curriculum transformation of the ten archival and records management modules offered at this LIS Department that was implemented in 2017, lament the missed opportunity to transform the archival curriculum during programme development. They posit that teaching and learning methods, as well as African theories and practices were missing in the curriculum.

Against this backdrop, it is evident that there is urgent need to shift from the theoretical discourse on social justice in education to exploring ways of infusing social justice in the curricula and promoting the publication and documenting of knowledge and philosophies of social justice in the form of articles textbooks will provide educators in universities with alternative paradigms. This essay explores the curricula and scholarly publications of the largest LIS school in South Africa which is situated at an Open Distance eLearning University and reimagines a social justice curriculum and social justice focused scholarly publications that may provide a basis for LIS educators in South Africa as they explore ways of embracing social justice in the

curricula and in scholarly publishing.LIS schools are departments that offer Library and Information Science education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

There are 26 public universities in the country and 9 LIS schools. The researcher purposively chooses one of the 26 universities to investigate its LIS Department because the concept of social justice is reflected in the institutional culture, curricula and research of this university. The university strives to promote humanness, anti-racism and self-worth in the context of cultural and intellectual differences for the attainment of equality, and will not tolerate unfair discrimination based on race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, HIV status or any other arbitrary grounds. The mission statement of this university is to be an African university shaping futures in service of humanity. It is also the largest Open Distance eLearning higher educational institution in the country. With a core value being the commitment to social justice and equity.

Transformation forms a critical part of the development of the curriculum at this university. Furthermore, the university has put in place necessary policy requirements to be considered at each step of the development of the curricula. To this end, it follows a framework for the implementation of a team approach to develop programmes that are appropriate for society and meet the standards of programmes prescribed by the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Higher Education Act, 1997). According to the framework, academics with a background in the discipline, education consultants and stakeholders should work together to ensure that programmes are developed and contextualised to address societal needs and develop lifelong learners who are competent and capable to realize the aspirations of society.

The LIS Department at this university is the largest in South Africa. It has been involved in the education and training of library and information professionals for over 60 years. It offers a wider variety of qualifications in different aspects and fields of Library and Information Science, ranging from short learning programmes, certificated certificates, diplomas, undergraduate, postgraduate, to graduate level. This LIS Department has highly qualified lecturers who are specialists in various aspects and fields. The Department seeks to equip its students with the best combination of knowledge and skills to work and survive in the information society.

As already noted, there has been a global trend in scholarly publication by LIS scholars to build tools and frameworks to incorporate and enhance social justice thinking and praxis in LIS education (Cooke & Sweeney, 2017; Mathiesen, 2015; Mehra, Albright & Rioux, 2006; Mehra, Rioux & Albright, 2009; Morales, Knowles & Bourg, 2014; Rioux, 2010).

Furthermore, there have been several seminars, conferences and symposiums organized globally by LIS scholars to promote the concept of social justice. For example, the LIS concept of implementing Social Justice in the Classroom originated in 2015 from a grassroots project by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) 2015 preconference workshop on social justice teaching in LIS known as Teaching for Justice. At this conference, editors and contributors offered a myriad of experiences and approaches to embedding social justice in the LIS curriculum (Jaeger, Shilton & Koepfler 2016). The Social Justice in Library and Information Science 4th International Conference on Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries was held in 2012, in Limerick (Mehra, 2014). Also, several LIS journals have published articles on social justice, which are *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, Archival Science, Library Trends, Advances in Librarianship, Education for Library and Information Science, The Library Quarterly, Education for Information, and The International Journal of Information Diversity & Inclusion.*

Research problem

Curriculum transformation features prominently on the agenda of South African higher education institutions, and policy frameworks and higher educational institutions are developing frameworks to enhance social justice in their curriculum. For example, Groenewald and Mpisi (2014) provide a framework for the recurriculated Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme at the Sol Plaatje University Kimberley, South Africa that equip students with knowledge and skills to realise the aim of social justice. Winberg and Winberg (2017) explore a social justice approach to decolonize an engineering curriculum in a university in South Africa.

Notwithstanding, LIS Schools in South Africa have not prioritized a social justice curriculum and there is little evidence of LIS seminars conferences and symposiums organized in South Africa with a social justice focus. Although LIS scholars in South Africa (Dube 2012; Ngoepe & Saurombe, 2021) lament the lack of Africanization at a particular LIS School, they did not provide a framework for the Africanization of the curriculum. Also, there are few scholarly publications by LIS scholars in South Africa on social justice and LIS education although these schools may profess social justice principles and commitment to fairness, equity, and diversity. This is confirmed by 2023 study on LIS research trends in South Africa which revealed that scholarly publications on LIS education have focused on core LIS topics, with LIS education and pedagogy being the least researched (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2023). Studies on LIS curriculum have focused on the need to realign the curriculum to the fourth industrial revolution (Mosweu & Netshakuma, 2023). Ocholla (2024) noted that LIS research publication trends show insignificant incremental growth as research is slowly shifting to non-traditional LIS technology driven-research subjects. Related studies by LIS professionals on social justice have not focused on the curriculum. For example, social justice and inclusivity (Raju et al., 2020), social justice and open access (Raju & Badrudeen,

2022) and social justice and South African academic libraries (Bangani & Dube, 2023).

In hindsight, Raju's (2015) study on an African Agenda in LIS Education in the digital era advocating for a paradigm shift in LIS Schools in Africa that will broaden the LIS interdisciplinary domain and stake an intellectual claim that will contribute to the growth and development of LIS services in Africa within the context of an African development agenda and the digital divide is a wakeup call in 2024.

Against this backdrop, this essay draws from the literature, theories and frameworks on social justice to re-imagine a curriculum for social justice and scholarly publishing at a LIS school in South Africa. A social justice focused LIS curriculum and scholarly publishing LIS will help students develop a critical understanding of social issues in an unjust society, enhance the principles of equity, participation, and help to address the social inequalities present in an unjust society.

Objective

This essay explores the curriculum and scholarly publishing of a LIS school in one of largest public universities in South Africa and re-imagines a social justice curriculum and scholarly publication at LIS schools.

Literature review

Social justice and social justice pedagogy

The concept of social justice is highly contested and varies according to perspectives and social theories. Most conceptions of social justice refer to a society that reflects liberty, equality, human rights and dignity, thus reflecting the values and symbols of the French Revolution (1789–1799) and the Declaration of Human Rights. Musara, Grant and Vorster (2021) posit that a social justice perspective should include individual and family relationships, as well as political, economic and cultural aspects. Social justice in Higher Education Intuitions is about ensuring that graduates are taught not only to pass but to make equitable changes in society that can help to disrupt cycles of oppression (Clayton & Williams, 2004). Bonnici et al. (2012) identified five major social justice typologies as justice as fairness, utilitarianism, justice as desert, egalitarianism/equity, and distributive justice.

Social justice pedagogy can be explored through different frameworks and perspectives. For example, the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy have distinct social justice agenda. Through co-investigation, dialogue and discussions, students develop their socio-political consciousness. By way of self-criticism and self-consciousness, students critique unequal power relations in society (Giroux, 2010).

Fraser's (2009) threedimensional interconnected but distinct genres of social justice are economic, the cultural and political. Social justice is achieved through the economic mode by redistribution of the resources of society, through the cultural mode by recognition parity of esteem and through the political mode by equity of representation (Fraser, 2009). In terms of a curriculum, redistribution is achieved through sharing knowledge and expertise as well as more tacit qualities such as qualities of professional practice and behavior.

Moje (2007) identifies affirmative and transformative approaches to enabling social justice. Affirmative approaches focus on social inclusion policies to rectify social, economic, and political exclusion of ethnic groups, distinct classes, or minorities. A transformative approach to academic literacies aims to foster critical thinking within scholarly communities and reduce inequalities in society. Moje (2007) also differentiates between a social justice pedagogy where every youth has an equitable opportunity to learn and a social justice pedagogy with transformative opportunities for all youth to question, challenge, and reconstruct knowledge.

Banks and Banks (2010) conceptualizes multicultural education as education that seeks to create opportunities for all students across different racial, ethnic, and social class groups as a field of social justice. This is one of the primary ways in which educators in the United States have worked to achieve the goals of social justice. Multicultural social justice education focuses more on oppression and structural inequality and seeks to reconstruct society towards greater equity regarding race, class, gender, religion and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). Ladson-Billings (2009:20) describes culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically because it uses cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Central to culturally responsive education is teacher identity and student performance.

From an epistemological perspective, Morrow (2009) argues that social justice is about learning how to become a participant in academic practice. He comments that in the same way in which no one else can run for another person, no one else can learn from another person. To access the learning, he asserts that learners need to face the difficulties and challenges of systematic learning and teachers need to face their responsibilities as teachers by supporting learners to face these challenges. Systematic teaching requires that the educator select and sequences valuable information that will result in knowledge acquisition. The educator should consider who is being taught, the time allocation, the topic, the language of teaching, as well as the teaching styles. Students need to be academically literate by mastering their disciplinary literacies to learn and engage with knowledge in their field.

This essay adopts Moje's (2007) and Morrow's (2009) perspective of social justice in education by advocating for the importance of critical thinking and epistemological access that will facilitate academic literacy and the responsiveness of the educator

Social justice in LIS curriculum

Mehra, Albright and Rioux (2006) are commended for the seminal perspective on the topic of social justice within the context of LIS. They propose an exploratory practical framework to consider social justice research in the information professions that calls for greater action-oriented social justice elements and agendas in information needs and use research.

Mehra, Rioux and Albright (2009) specifically address the ways by which social responsibility can be implemented into syllabi in the study of the core values of the field for librarians and archivists. They contend that by using social responsibility and diversity as core organizing curricular principles, LIS schools and instructors can both teach the traditional canons while at the same time providing critiques and power analyses that are necessary for preparing students and professionals to work in complex, shifting, and increasingly global communities.

Singh and Rioux (2021) Advanced Certificate Curriculum in Social Justice for Information Professionals course was structured as: Race Consciousness and the Provision of Information Services; Mitigating the Effects of Fake News and Misinformation; Promoting Well-being in the Information Society and Information Work Informed by Social Work. They note that the core LIS curriculum course has topics on user advocacy, access to information, diversity and the digital divide (Singh & Rioux, 2021).

Bonnici et al. (2012) analyzed the curricular approaches to diversity of the LIS schools' curricula as it relates to issues of physiological access and reveal that LIS curricula includes both topics of physical impairment and socially classified populations as diversity issues although not explicitly defined at this macro-analytical level.

Cooke, Sweeney and Noble (2016) advocate for cultural competency and an awareness and advocate that the range of social justice issues in LIS education requires an approach that emphasizes culture; context and critical thinking that extends across curricula, professional practice, and research. They noted that in an increasingly changing society LIS professionals face diverse patron demographics and an increasingly complicated society that influences, shapes, and colors their organization's services and resource, yet they do not have the opportunity to learn about the harder, sensitive, and personal topics that may permeate their professional environments, such as race, class, sexuality, and gender. Kumasi and Manlov (2016) report on a study that examined how multicultural curriculum reform concepts and pedagogies

might be implemented in core courses taught in LIS programs accredited by ALA.

Cooke and Sweeney (2017) highlight the need for incorporating explicit theoretical foundations in social justice courses that include what it means and how it contributes to library practice to be integrated in LIS studies, such as the CRT. In the same vein, Leonard and Smale (2013) suggests that students could understand user information behaviors and needs, and design services and systems intended to serve users in all communities using CRT. Leonard and Smale (2013), further posit that the CRT provides useful concepts and frameworks for accomplishing user behavior in ways that acknowledge a diverse range of experiences, engage students with critical approaches and teaching them to be thoughtful and methodical in their consumption of the status quo. Noble et al. (2014) noted that teaching theories of power contextualized by neoliberalism and capitalism in LIS courses provide a framework for thinking about the kinds of interventions LIS professionals can make in service of social justice in broader social, political, and economic contexts.

Cooke, Sweeney and Noble (2016) noted that course on Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Information Professions was redesigned to examine how issues of race, gender, and sexuality are represented in the information professions. Other social justice topics that have been examined in LIS are health, and sexual orientation topics (Mehra & Tidwell, 2014; Kumasi & Manlov, 2016).

Cooke, Sweeney and Noble (2016) advocate the need for social justice as a topic and tool for transforming LIS curricula and culture by exploring the implementation of social justice–themed courses and an extracurricular reading group in one LIS department. Exploring curricular and extracurricular cases in a shared institutional setting contextualizes key challenges and conversations that can inform similar initiatives in other institutions. Transforming LIS culture to prioritize social justice values, epistemologies, and frameworks requires multivalent strategies, community buy-in, and shared responsibility in terms of the labor of leading and sustaining engagement with social justice. They also explored strategies and challenges of employing social justice as both a subject and a tool for discussing diversity, equality, racism, power, and privilege in LIS education. They noted that training culturally competent and socially responsible library and information professionals requires a blended approach that extends across curricula, professional practice, and research.

Gibson, Hughes-Hassell and Threats (2018) presented the following titles and possible social justice courses in LIS: Introduction to the Library Professions; Information and Information Environments; Information in Social and Cultural Contexts; Foundations of the Information, Professions, Information and Society and Human Information Interactions.

As an instructor of three graduate library and information science (LIS)-related courses taught at the University of Alabama (UA), Mehra (2021) discusses critical pedagogies and reflective practices topics of social justice taught in a graduate programme since spring 2019, providing a glimpse of student learning outcomes, assignment requirements, tangible deliverables, student evaluations, and course opportunities and challenges.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, case study research design, narrative review, document analysis and purpose sampling. Narrative reviews are scholarly summaries, clarification and assessment of conceptual harmonizing forms of intellectualism (Greenhalgh & Malterud, 2018). The procedures of narrative reviews resonate with subjectivist and interpretivist research paradigms (Sukhera, 2022). Narrative review was chosen because it allows for in-depth to analysis, review and interpretation on an under-researched area such as social justice and scholarly publishing in the LIS curricula. There are 9 LIS Schools in South Africa among which are: University of the Western Cape, University of Limpopo. University of South Africa, University of Pretoria, University of KwaZulu-Natal University of Zululand University of Fort Hare, University of Cape Town and Durban University of Technology The study is based on a case study of one LIS Department under investigation which was purposively selected because it is one of the largest LIS schools in South Africa and offers a wider variety of qualifications in different aspect and fields of LIS. Another reason was because the researcher is a member of staff in this Department and has taught some of the courses and therefore had insights exposure and experience as a member of the Department. Key themes that were researched were social justice, social justice curriculum, LIS curriculum and scholarly publishing. Searches were conducted from August to September 2024. A document analysis was conducted on the LIS module forms, course offerings, course titles, course descriptions and scholarly publications from the website of the LIS Department under investigation to better understand the curriculum and provide suggestions on how social justice issues could be introduced or taught.

Findings and discussions

The findings revealed that the staff of the LIS Department has transformed in the last fifteen years from a White dominated LIS Department to an almost Black dominated Department with a diverse group of staff. The Department is committed to upholding equity and social justice by providing services to an increasingly diverse group of students in terms of disability, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality and cultures. Like the rest of the university, it is committed to implementing the institution's Transformation Charter (University of South Africa, 2011) at both the programme and module levels, as a phased-in approach. The Department has also prioritized language transformation and has developed a "Glossary of Terms" in various modules as positive

step in enhancing epistemological discipline access. The Department was part of a 2024 Teaching and Learning Festival organized by the University to support marginalized languages with the theme education for social Justice (University of South Africa, 2024). The Department is also focusing on the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in teaching. It also adopted a positive step in the right direction in the 2023 academic year by ensuring that elements of social justice are infused across the curricula through scenario-based assessments that incorporate situational and contextual elements that enable students to reflect on their perceptions and experiences on social justice in ways that facilitates connections with libraries, archives and community organizations.

Notwithstanding, infusing social justice in the curriculum is still at a slow pace. There are no specific courses on social justice offered by the Department. The following are some of the modules offered at the Department with elements of social justice:

- User Studies, Advocacy,
- Ethical Use of Information,
- Information Literacies,
- Managing Library and Information Services
- ICTs in Libraries, and Archives,
- Social Aspects of Information,
- Theory of Information Science,
- Management of Library and Information services
- Introducing Archives and Records Management,
- Introducing Information Science,
- ICT Applications in Libraries and Information Services,
- ICT Applications in Archives and Records.

Critical literature theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Feminist theories, and critical methods, and approaches are not taught at the research methodology courses nor in Theory of Information Science module. CRT has gained momentum in the humanities and social sciences as an innovative theory and methodology that attends to the intersection of race class, gender, power and law. It offers a structural approach to analyzing racism while leveraging the experiential knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Notwithstanding the school of thought argues that CRT targets white people and is intentionally racially inflammatory the reality is that open and uncomfortable discussions on race- dynamics in the education space are a positive step in enhancing an effective social justice curriculum.

Scholarly publications in social justice by academics has been few and far between. Among the social justice related themes where research has been conducted by scholars are: HIV/AIDs, climate change, poverty, community radios, women in agriculture, unsung heroes in sports, Internet access, digital literacy, digital inclusion and Africanization of curriculum. It was commendable to note a 2023 publication in the IFA Journal which an academic published with a graduate student entitled academic libraries as contributors to social justice and ubuntu through community engagement. The research area and topics in the Department are generally influenced by the research interest of the individual academic staff and/or graduate students' research focus. More often the major drive to publish among LIS academics is to fulfil a key performance area of research, thus conducting research is seen more of an obligation to publish or perish rather than researching towards social justice issues. Although colleagues are encouraged to promote multi-/inter-/trans-disciplinary research, social justice which is one of the key values of the university does not feature as one of the 31 research focus areas of LIS academics at the website of the LIS Department.Areas of research related to social justice listed on the website are information law, ethics and society and social informatics (Department of Information Science, 2024).

The incumbent Vice Chancellor at university's 150 anniversary celebration recommitted the institution to social justice, equity by noting that the university continues to advocate for social justice and equality, both within the institution and in broader society (Pretoria News, 2023).

The postgraduate program at the Department is offered purely by research and students are enrolled in the program based on the suitability and viability of the intended research, adequate supervisory capacity, and research expertise in the discipline or department. The Departmental Journal known as Mousaion: South African Journal of Information Science has not prioritized publications on social justice.

As earlier noted, the Department engages in extra curricula activities in the form of seminars, lectures, community engaged research and diverse multicultural events that could be considered as social justice focused. For example, it organizes annual Information Science and Archival seminars and lectures on diverse topics and experiences from diverse perspectives, with speakers from diverse backgrounds on topical areas in Information Science.

Some social justice focused community engagement carried out by staff members are: sports archives, information and computer literacy, storytelling and heritage, and women in research. During the South African Women's month in August 2024 the LIS Department at Unisa together with the University Library and Information

Services, organized a grand talk exhibition commemorating the remarkable courage and solidarity shown by women who sacrificed immensely for the liberation, including those who were brutally murdered by the police on 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville.

The Department also organizes a Biennial Conference on Library and Information Science Research in Africa that strives to provide a forum for scholars from different countries to reflect on original and innovative ways of enhancing the role of information science and libraries and information services in addressing the socio-economic developmental issues globally and on the African continent and invites speakers from diverse background and perspective.

Towards re-imagining a social justice LIS curricula and scholarly publishing at a LIS Department in South Africa

This section draws from the literature and findings from the preceding section to re-imagine a curriculum and a scholarly publication with a social justice agenda at the LIS Department. It re-imagines a LIS curriculum that will intentionally place social justice in the classroom, in the pedagogy, research and extra curricula activities of the LIS school. It advocates for social justice to be weaved into the entire curriculum from Certificate, Diploma to Graduate programmes. For example: Munala, Allen, Beall and My Phi, (2023), in a public health social justice framework for curriculum reform advocated the need to create a coherent curriculum that seamlessly weaves social justice as the common thread throughout the curriculum. A Short Learning Programme or a Higher Certificate in Social Justice in LIS could be a good starting point. Singh and Rioux (2021) developed an Advanced Certificate curriculum in Social Justice for Information Professionals at St. John's University (SJU) for LIS practitioners and LIS students are explicitly grounded in social justice principles and concepts that seek to enhances capabilities to substantively counter racism challenges.

Prioritizing the needs of the diverse students in the Department and promoting inclusion should be at the core of the curriculum, bearing in mind the diverse nature of the Department and the future information professionals. Cooke, Sweeney and Noble (2016) noted that creating and maintaining elements of diversity and social justice across the LIS curriculum whether in stand-alone classes or woven throughout the curriculum, will enable students to come out of these classes with the ability to recognize, accept, and celebrate the differences that exist within the diversity. A standalone course in Social Justice in Library and Information Science that integrates diversity, inclusivity anti-racism, sexism, and survival in society should be offered at the entry level of the LIS curriculum. This course should seek to define social justice from an information science perspective, given that most students may not even have heard of the concept. The course should also include elements of digital access

and meta literacy in the era of disruptive technologies given that technologies offer opportunities to considerably increase the social justice impact of information institutions.

The Library and Information Association of South Africa (LAISA) should only grant accreditation for future LIS courses after verification that social justice is weaved in the curriculum. For example, Kumasi and Manlov (2016) reports on a study that examined the multicultural curriculum reform concepts and pedagogies implemented in core courses taught in LIS programs only after accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). Drawing from LIS social justice researchers (Cooke, Sweeney & Noble, 2016; Helkenberg et al., 2018; Mehra, 2021), the following are some social justice topics that could be benchmarked in the infusion of the social justice content in LIS curricula:

- Diversity/multiculturalism;
- Whiteness in LIS;
- Indigenization and decolonization;
- Inclusion advocacy,
- Diversity leadership in information organizations,
- Community-engaged scholarship and digital divide;
- Privilege/the Ivory Tower;
- Gender inequality/feminism,
- Environmentalism and sustainability.
- Accessibility, mental health;
- Privacy and surveillance;
- The commodification of information.
- Homelessness;
- Colonialism, immigration needs;
- Censorship and biases,
- Child rights.
- Africanization
- Youth need safe spaces.

In terms of pedagogy, the subject contents should be steeped in theories and critical thinking and diverse and multicultural activities that address social justice issues from an information science perspective. CRT feminist theory, Marxist theory should be prioritized in classrooms and research. Researchers have advocated that CRT, and its related concepts provide a structural framework for preparing LIS students and graduates to recognize and address racism, understand how power and privilege shape LIS institutions and professional practice and to embrace social justice as an LIS value. (Leckie & Buschmann, 2010; Cooke, Sweeney & Noble, 2016; Gibson, Hughes-Hassell & Threats, 2018). As Gibson, Hughes-Hassell

and Threats (2018) noted social justice should be showcased into theoretical frameworks and teaching in and out of the classroom, using innovative thinking and pedagogical practices beyond templates that encourages both curiosity and creativity for the reader. Critical thinking is about increasing and motivating students' knowledge and skills to challenge and discuss issues of social justice. It requires the participation and reflection of learners, in the knowledge process (Darder et al., 2009). For example, LIS educators may engage learners in the classroom discussions and dialog on the Eurocentric course content with an emphasis on deconstructing the status quo and making recommendations. Mehra (2021) applied critical pedagogies and reflective practices on the social justice topics taught at the University of Alabama since spring 2019. As an interdisciplinary field, the LIS Department could liaise with disciplines such as gender studies and social work, that are attuned to a wide variety of social issues on social justice to gain insights into their teachings and theories. It may encourage students to take up elective courses on social justice in these disciplines dealing with fairness, justice, equity, equality and change agency.

Extra-curricular activities at seminars, symposiums and community engagement by LIS educators provide opportunities for critical conversations in which aspects of social justice can be intermingled purposefully. Although the Department prides itself in celebrating diverse events, mainly celebrating diversity or multicultural events is not enough, the conversation on diversity is confined to race, ethnicity, gender, ability, language, literacy, geography and capitalism, this is enough. The Department can approach diversity and inclusion as broad issues, including digital inclusion, equity, digital literacy, education, sexual orientation and access to services for a marginalized population among others. Furthermore, it is instructive that the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland hosted the 2014 *Symposium on Diversity and Library and Information Science Education* (Jaeger, Sarin & Peterson, 2015). The Department may also liaise with other disciplines to conduct community-engaged teaching on information work that further principles and actions related to social justice and inclusion.

Given that there is a clear deficit of social justice and race-related scholarships by academics, the university may consider providing researchers special incentives for publishing on social justice topics and for publishing critical scholarly publications using critical theories that go beyond quick-fix research as a form of research incentive.

The departmental accredited Journal may consider a Special Issue on Social Justice in Library and Information Science in Africa as noted in the following international examples; The Library Trends published a 2015 special issue on the topic of libraries and social justice. Also, the Advances in Librarianship book series published two edited volumes devoted to libraries and social justice in 2015 and 2016 (Gorham, Taylor &

Jaeger, 2016). In 2014, Archival Science published a special double issue on archives and social justice, focusing on the roles of archives in the creation, preservation, and use of documenting human rights crises (Caswell, 2014, 207). The special issue of Library Quarterly (vol. 83, no. 3) featured papers from the first symposium. This special issue also presented some of the many highlights of the 2014 symposium, with speakers converting their talks into articles that convey their key messages.

The LIS school should take advantage of its Biennial International Conference and consider organizing a conference with social justice as a theme. For example, social justice was the theme of the 2015 Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE) conference. Such conferences provide an opportunity for open communication and dialogue that will provide LIS educators an opportunity to openly and freely unravel history, surface social justice issues confront the effects, and ultimately prioritize social justice in the research and scholarly publications. Given that the graduate program at this institution is offered purely on the suitability and viability of the intended research, with no course work, academics should ensure that students' proposed research topics have elements of social justice and students should also be encouraged to take up topics that are social justice related. Alternatively, the process of curriculum reform may consider infusing course work in the graduate degree program that will infuse social justice courses.

Conclusion

This essay re-imagines a social justice curriculum and scholarly publication for one of the largest LIS schools in South Africa. It advocates that the curriculum should intentionally be integrated into the classroom, teaching, research, and extracurricular activities from short learning programmes, certificate courses to the graduate level. If the primary mission of the LIS profession is to serve and transform their communities, it stands to reason that future information professionals should be equipped to meet the needs of the diverse communities for which they advocate. There is a dearth of empirical research on the practical roadmap on how social justice may be integrated into the curriculum, research and extracurricular activities in the LIS schools in South Africa. Also, incorporating social justice in the curriculum remains a systematic process with buy-in from different stakeholders, adherence to policies, and cost implications as the need may arise for additional staff for the new courses. It also requires an understanding of a social justice framework for curriculum design so that curriculum will be a socially just curriculum. Future research should focus on a broader sample of LIS schools with an in-depth quantitative and qualitative empirical investigation to establish how social justice can be integrated in LIS curriculum in South Africa. There is an urgent need to equip the next generation of information scientists with social justice education that will enable LIS professionals to provide brave and radical services to their communities. Educating committed, culturally competent information professionals is

crucial for a deeper understanding of inequalities in access to information, gender, race, privilege, and oppression, which are necessary for bridging racial inequity in society.

As LIS educators in South Africa are committed to exploring ways to educate for social justice and scholarly publishing championing social justice in the LIS curricula and scholarly publication at the largest LIS Department in South Africa is certainly a positive step in the right direction.

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