

Propelling towards global realignment of LIS curricula through scholarly communication at the University of Botswana

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Abstract

The issue of curriculum is considered fundamental in knowledge, skills and competencies acquisition. The trend and emerging development in the world of knowledge and information lend credence to the postulation that LIS programme in any institution of learning should never be static and lethargic, but vibrant and dynamic. The vibrancy of a programme can be guaranteed when the operators of the programmes refrain from operating in silos but adhere to research publications and other scholarly writings in the design of their curricula. The purpose of this essay was to examine the drive towards global realignment of LIS curricula through scholarly communication at the University of Botswana (UB). With a setback suffered when one of its high flying products was refused admission for higher degree programme in a UK university, the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) needed no further evidence of the shortfall of its curricula. DLIS subscribes to scholarly communication turning the tide. Through literature review, the essay established the advocacy for global realignment of curricula generally in the 21st century. As a dynamic programme the general clamour for upgrading and strengthening of LIS curricula in line with the demand of a fast-changing world was established. The essay discussed measures including comparability matrix setting the tone for global realignment of LIS curricula at UB. Other strategies mentioned include consultation with Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, iSchools, etc. and engagement of international scholars prior to the five-yearly review of its programmes. Some recommendations are also offered.

Keywords: comparability matrix, scholarly communication, LIS curricula, information technology, continuing professional development

Introduction

The issue of curriculum is fundamental in education, knowledge and skills acquisition and it has attracted the attention of numerous pundits. Examining the concept of curriculum,

Wyse and Manyukhina (2024) refer to it as the planned activities and experiences that education systems organise for students to help them achieve learning goals that are usually specified at national, school, and classroom levels. Marope (2017) sees curriculum as active and beyond a particular generation when she defines it as a dynamic and transformative articulation of collective expectations of the purpose, quality, and relevance of education and learning to holistic, inclusive, just, peaceful, and sustainable development, and to the well-being and fulfillment of current and future generations. Kabita and Ji (2017) believe that curriculum should meet the needs of the individual citizens and the nation in their description of it as the vehicle through which a country empowers its citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to be socially and economically engaged and empowered, for personal and national development. Taking it beyond national level to a global dimension, Stabback (2016) in a discourse titled *What Makes a Quality Curriculum? Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum and Learning*, perceives curriculum as representing a conscious and systematic selection of knowledge, skills and values: a selection that shapes the way teaching, learning and assessment processes are organized by addressing questions such as what, why, when and how students should learn. In a broader sense, Stabback claims the curriculum is also understood as a political and social agreement that reflects a society's common vision while taking into account local, national and global needs and expectations.

Writing on what should be the contents of the curriculum in the new age in a paper titled *21st Century Standards and Curriculum: Current Research and Practice*, Alismail and McGuir (2015) cited Paige (2009) asserting that adopting a 21st century curriculum should blend knowledge, thinking, innovation skills, media, information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, and real life experience in the context of core academic subjects. They argue that in order to achieve authentic learning that is demanded in the 21st century, students engage in the learning environment effectively and develop 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Alismail and McGuir further cited Lombardi (2007) who insists that preparing curriculum to be connected with the real world can support student participation, their motivation and understanding for the academic subjects, as well as preparing them for adult life. In a review which he titled *Competences: Curriculum on the Move*, Hughes (2024) alludes to a UNESCO-International Bureau of Education (Kabita & Ji, 2017) paper that provides a hint on the efforts being made by a number of think tanks including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the 21st Century Skills Partnership, the Centre for Curriculum Redesign and the World Economic Forum, *on the design of curricula in the new age*. Hughes declares that these groups have been pointing to the need to design a more skills-based curriculum whereby classical disciplinary boundaries are broken down and what is developed in learners is a set of broader skills such as creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking.

Whilst skills development is not relegated to the background, acquisition of competences is also canvassed. Kabita & Ji (2017) defines competency as the ability to apply learning resources and outcomes (knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal, or professional development). In a similar vein, Hughes (2024) perceives competency as a unity of skill, knowledge and disposition, and listed seven competences that emerge from a Kabita & Ji (2017) study: namely: Lifelong learning (curiosity, critical thinking, ever-seeking); Self-agency (entrepreneurship, responsibility, self-worth, creativity, grit); Interacting with others (respect, open-mindedness, sensitivity, 'follow-ship', fellowship leadership); Interacting with the world (environmental custodianship, being global); Interacting with diverse tools and resources (using technology and available resources creatively, wisely, ethically and sustainably); Transdisciplinarity (thinking through and across episteme and systems, making connections, finding solutions to global problems) and Multi-literateness (intercultural literacy, health literacy, scientific literacy, data literacy, financial literacy, numeracy, general literacy).

UNESCO-IBE argues that a competency-based curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than mainly focusing on what they are expected to know. This is further elaborated when the organization double down stating that in principle, such a curriculum is learner-centred and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers, and society. The implication of this stance is that learners can acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to solve situations they encounter in everyday life. Gouëdard et al. (2020) also cited Wesselink et al. (2010) in their recognition of a global shift towards a competence-centred curriculum and affirms it implies an emphasis on the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable a person to perform a certain task in ill-defined and unique environments. In the review of literature on curriculum reform, OECD alludes to the view of Mulder (2001) on competence development that a competence-centred curriculum aims to provide students with an integrated performance-oriented capability to reach specific achievements that would allow them to navigate through a world that is constantly changing and full of uncertainty.

In the light of the above context, it is evident that the world is indeed in times of great changes where the old order is crumbling rapidly and new systems of life and activities are emerging – a development that requires educators to prepare the students not only for the current but also for the future change. The trend and emerging development in the world of knowledge and information lend credence to the postulation that LIS programme in any institution of learning should never be static and lethargic, but vibrant and dynamic. Several authors have done studies on the curricula of LIS in various parts of the world. For instance, among others, Chu and Raju et al. (2022) produced IFLA guidelines for professional library and information science (LIS) education programmes. Matusiak, Stansbury, and

Barczyk, (2014) delved into educating a new generation of library and information science professionals in the United States and also alluded to what obtains in Europe. Ocholla and Bothma (2007) discussed the status, trends and challenges of library and information education and training in Eastern and Southern Africa. Akanwa and Okorie (2020) did an x-ray of the nature of LIS programme as practiced in Nigeria. In East Africa, Lutwama and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) did a tracer study of the LIS graduates (1995-1999) working in Uganda. Aina and Moahi (1999) also carried out a tracer study of the Botswana Library School graduates. It becomes obvious from the various studies undertaken that LIS is a programme for the current and emerging global society in which its products will be germane. In this respect, with different levels of LIS programme on offer (including certificate, diploma, degree and higher degree levels), it is expected that on completion of their programme especially at degree and higher degree levels, the new professionals should be skilled and knowledgeable enough not only to be able to practice their profession anywhere, but to also be able to function effectively in any section of information and knowledge establishment they find themselves. However, studies have shown that many of early career librarians lack the capacity to effectively carry out the tasks assigned in some critical areas that involve information technology, information and knowledge organisation, especially cataloguing and classification etc. For instance, in South Africa, lack of interest among newcomers in cataloguing was observed by De Klerk & Fourie (2017), which the authors attributed to deficiency in general knowledge. Similarly, Kyprianos, Efthymiou, & Kouis, (2022) in their survey of undergraduate students' perceptions and feelings about cataloging reported that students do not feel very confident about the skills they have acquired in cataloguing.

On completion of their undergraduate or master's programmes, it should also be possible for the products of any library schools to proceed and further their studies in any institution of their choice without any let or hindrance. Unfortunately, still, the noticeable deficiency in the curricula as may be evident in the transcript, when presented to some new institution of choice, may stall their progress or inhibit them from advancing their studies until the necessary rectification is carried out. This often leads to frustration and disappointment as the applicants may be advised to register for additional modules or do more years of study to qualify for admission for the desired higher degree programme, if the admission is not outrightly declined.

It is in the light of the above that this essay embraces the clarion call for global realignment of LIS curricula. The development of a curriculum should necessarily be a product of a series of consultation and collaboration among scholars in library and information schools across the world. At the University of Botswana efforts are being made and observed for global realignment in processing acceptable LIS curricula using the vehicle of scholarly communication. The Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) ensures its curricula, qualifications and programmes are not just accredited at home by Botswana

Qualification Authority but receive endorsement from outside by LIS scholars and bodies as well. A number of other strategies are being undertaken to ensure the programmes on offer are not demeaned. The steps taken along this direction are considered in this essay.

Statement of the problem

LIS programme is a global education venture operating in various institutions of higher learning across the world. The advocacy for a global design and realignment of its curricula should be considered essential and of necessity. Stabback (2016) iterates that curriculum should take into account local, national and global needs and expectations. Marope (2017) confirms that credible curricula processes are necessarily inclusive and consultative involving professionals, local, national, and global communities at large. The development of curricula should be an upshot of unfettered cross-fertilisation of ideas through scholarly communication among LIS schools and scholars globally culminating in harmony of curricula, effective teaching and learning, especially core courses, and ease of movements among LIS graduates for higher degree programmes to any institution of choice. Regrettably, evidence of discordance and shortfall in LIS curricula has been established among library schools. For instance, in a comparative study of library and information science curricula in tertiary institutions in South-East Nigeria, Nwosu, Eyisi, and Aghauche (2013) revealed the absence of uniformity and conformity in the LIS curricula in the universities studied. Probably more worrisome is the revelation by Saka, Garba, and Zarmai (2018) that some universities and polytechnics are offering LIS diploma programmes that are not accredited. The corollary of the discordant tunes of LIS curricula is the adverse effect it imposes on the new entrants into the profession who graduated without adequate knowledge, skills and competences to be marketable, and meet the demand of the new age of information and knowledge in workplaces. In some cases, the new graduates find it a Herculean task to gain admission for further studies in the institutions of their choice with their transcripts.

A preponderance of literature exists on the inability of the newly graduated LIS professionals to carry out some salient tasks like organising knowledge and information – i.e. cataloguing and classification, information and communication technology related tasks etc. (De Klerk & Fourie, 2017; Kyprianos, Efthymiou, & Kouis, 2022; Oladokun & Mooko, 2023). Truncation of plans of some LIS graduates also occurs when they were denied admission into higher degree programmes of other institutions in a country different from where they initially studied. For instance, the Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Botswana, once embarrassingly witnessed an instance when its degree certificate was downgraded to diploma and admission was denied to a former student who had applied to do a master's degree programme in LIS at a UK university. In another case witnessed, a LIS master's degree holder was denied admission into a PhD programme in another country different from where he did his master's degree. The reason for the

denial was said to be in the duration of the master's degree which was six months shy of the expected two years acceptable duration for such programme in the new institution. The candidate was then requested to do a year-long master's programme by research to be qualified for admission into the PhD programme. The global discordant tunes in LIS education and training seem to smack of inadequate comparative evidence that can be nipped in the bud through appropriate and adherence to scholarly communication.

All in all, a curriculum should not only reflect the local needs; the universal needs should be considered as well. Whilst it was obvious that the UB LIS curricula largely meet the local needs, there was no guarantee that the curricula suitably responded to the global needs. Thus, the need arises for the UB LIS curricula to be updated not only to accommodate the changing needs of the profession as observed internationally, but also to mitigate the deficiency perceived in the curricula that denies its graduates from gaining admission to the UK universities.

Objective

Principally, the purpose of the study was to examine the drive towards global realignment of LIS curricula through scholarly communication at the University of Botswana. Specifically, the essay aimed to:

- Determine and justify the advocacy for global repositioning and realignment of curricula through scholarly communication
- Establish the efforts of the University of Botswana in global realignment of its LIS curricula through scholarly communication

Literature review

The review of literature in this study is segmented into two, namely: Curriculum development and scholarly communication on LIS curricula

Curriculum development

Staake (2023) identifies curriculum development as the process of determining what students will learn in a specific course of study, adding that at the broadest level, curriculum developers consider what subjects or topics are appropriate for the learning group. The developers then drill down into more detail in each subject or topic, setting the learning objectives and goals students will be able to achieve upon completing the course. Perhaps the explanation is more detailed in the account of Camosun College (2024) in Canada, as the institution states that curriculum refers to the principle-driven actions and processes that guide and foster significant learning experiences. The College affirms that curriculum development is a planned, thoughtful and deliberate course of actions that ultimately enhance the quality and impact of the learning experience for students and that it includes

the development and organization of learning activities designed to meet intended learning outcomes. The institution further adds that the development also involves the thoughtful assessment of those learning outcomes, stressing that the ultimate goal of curriculum is to enhance the quality and impact of the teaching and learning experience.

In her own submission on reconceptualizing and repositioning curriculum in the 21st century, Marope (2017) contends that curricula determine the fate of individuals, communities, countries, and the world, by determining what, why, when, and how people learn. In what seems to be a subscription to the views of other authors, Marope explains that credible curricula processes should involve stakeholders far beyond the boundaries of the education sector to include professional, local, national, and global communities at large.

Several agencies and scholars are of the view that school curricula should be critically reviewed. The need for curriculum change is motivated by many factors. UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE) (2015), which oversees the policies and processes of curriculum development, expresses educational domains (policy-making, educational planning, curriculum development, teacher education, student learning and assessment, etc.) to give effect to lifelong learning. The Bureau states that curriculum development and change should be guided by a holistic and systemic approach, which is critical to ensuring effectiveness and sustainability, instead of a piecemeal approach. The Bureau further emphasised that such change processes should be based on broad consultations, in order to ensure relevance, common understanding, ownership, commitment, and support. Examining the significance of curriculum development, Creatrix (2023: 1) highlights its immense importance in education for several reasons including:

- Alignment with educational goals which ensures that the educational programs align with the overall goals of an institution and helps create a clear vision of what students should learn and achieve.
- Relevance and currency where educators can ensure that the content and instructional strategies are up-to-date, and integrate with current knowledge, emerging trends, and real-world applications.
- Consistency and coherence which are provided in learning experience for students; ensure that learning activities are interconnected, build upon one another, and promote a deeper understanding of concepts.
- Learning outcomes and assessment – which ensure that the identification and articulation of specific learning outcomes are made possible, making it easier to assess student progress and achievement.
- Flexibility and adaptability that offer the possibility to meet the evolving needs and diverse learning styles of students and ensuring that the curriculum can be modified or adjusted based on feedback, emerging research, or changes in educational policies.

- Continuous improvement - Curriculum development facilitates on-going evaluation, feedback and improvement of educational programs

In their write up on guides to curriculum review Dyjur, Grant, and Kalu (2019: 5) list out the benefits of undertaking a curriculum review thus: Enhance student learning and experiences; Provide an opportunity for critical reflection on the program's curriculum; Articulate the strengths of a program; Increase discussion and collaboration among instructors and others who play a role in the program; Provide opportunities for student voice and input; Reflect on and strengthening teaching and learning practices; Provide evidence to guide decision-making within the program; Understand the relationship among courses within a program and Identify specific actions to strengthen an academic program.

Writing on the need for curriculum reform, Burns and Brooks (1970) - two veterans on curriculum development, listed fourteen reasons why curricula need changing. Some of the listed reasons considered pertinent to this study include: living in a global society; living in a rapidly changing world; culture is experiencing information explosion; new technical innovations for which new curricula patterns can be designed; knowledge of what is true is constantly changing; the behavioural definition of learning products revealing deficiencies in the present curricula.

In their treatise on the process of change in curriculum, Dayao and Aquino (2022) acknowledge that the process involves teachers, schools, and the community, and is aimed at enhancing professional growth and improving the effectiveness of education. Dayao and Aquino argue that, curriculum changes are necessary to ensure that educational programs remain relevant and meet the needs of students in a changing world. Ng (2020) also obviously conceived the idea of change in curriculum when he advocates that future curriculum needs to break away from the present subject based design but to look beyond, moving into more multidisciplinary, trans-disciplinary where the lines between subjects are blurring, where big ideas are being explored and where learning can be more holistic and meaningful. In embracing the change in curriculum, Gouëdard et al. (2020) cited Chingos and Whitehurst (2012) in their observation that the interest in curriculum change and reforms has not only been sparked by the necessity to ensure that students have the skills and attitudes suited for the 21st century, but also by the potential impact of the adoption of a specific curriculum on students' learning outcomes.

Leaning on the belief that scholarly communication is of significance in developing curriculum, Stabback (2016) affirms that the development of curriculum should take account of good research and practice in and beyond a particular country.

The implication of this is that looking inwards (at the current curriculum), outwards (at what others are doing –locally, nationally and internationally), and forwards (at what we need to do to prepare young people for their futures).More specifically, it also implies that curriculum development should have reliance on scholarly communication borne out of research and the practice within and, or outside any country.

Though the steps may be varied or modified to meet the needs of the students and stakeholders, Button (2021) asserts that many curriculum development textbooks present the stages of the curriculum development process as follows: 1) Needs analysis or assessment 2) Setting goals and objectives 3) Course organization 4) Selecting and preparing teaching materials and 5) Evaluation. Similar to Button's reflection on stages of the curriculum development, Kabita and Ji (2017) allude to an age-long but pertinent Tyler's (1949: 1) observation that educators need to reflect on four specified questions, when planning change in education, and especially the curriculum: First, what educational purposes should the school seek to attain? Second, what educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? Third, how can these educational experiences be effectively organized? Fourth, how can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? Stabback (2016:11) also suggests a contribution on 'what makes a quality curriculum?' by listing out the following as criteria: Are there clear aims for the curriculum? Is the curriculum up-to-date? Is it relevant to students' current and future lives, experiences, environments and aspirations? Does it create a socially and economically prosperous future? Is the curriculum equitable and inclusive? (i.e. does it take into account the diversity of learners and the different learner needs; does it cater for marginalized groups; does it avoid biases); Is the curriculum learner-centred and learner-friendly? (i.e. does it take learner needs into account; does it avoid discrimination; does it contribute to personal development and life skills; does it make sense – is it meaningful for learners); Is the curriculum open and flexible, so that it can address new challenges and opportunities by integrating new/emerging issues?; Is the curriculum coherent and consistent across different education stages/grades/streams and learning areas/subjects?

Marope (2017:10), in her advocacy on reconceptualising and repositioning curriculum in the 21st Century: a global paradigm shift, declares that the new paradigm recognizes curriculum as a more dynamic, complex, and multi-dimensional concept than its current conceptualizations portray. She asserts that the change calls for a reconceptualization of curriculum along the following key dimensions: the first operational tool for ensuring the sustained development relevance of education and learning systems; a catalyst for innovation, disruption, and social transformation; a force for social equity, justice, cohesion, stability, and peace; an integrative core of education systems; an enabler of lifelong

learning; a determinant of the quality of education and learning; a determinant of key cost drivers of education and learning systems; and a lifelong learning system in its own right.

Of particular relevance in this discourse is the issue of localization and internationalization in curriculum development, which has been specifically ascribed to Stabback (2016) and Marope (2017) in this essay. With the conviction that local identity should be preserved, whilst exposure to a globalized world should also be embraced, Verbolabs (2024) considers globalization or internationalization as the process of integrating economies, societies, and cultures through the exchange of goods, services, and ideas. The organization believes the goal is to create a common educational framework that can be applied globally. Affirming that the goal of localization is to create an educational framework that is tailored to the unique needs of a particular region or community, Verbolabs defines localization as the process of adapting educational practices, policies, and curricula to meet the needs of a specific region or community. As the world of work and business is becoming more international, more globalised, more multicultural and more cosmopolitan, Chu and Raju et al. (2022) were emphatic that developers of LIS programme should ensure it meets local quality criteria and institutional missions, and it is aligned with international quality guidelines.

Scholarly communication on LIS curricula

Kabita & Ji (2017) made a clamour that numerous countries are currently developing or revising their curriculum in light of the global trend emphasizing on 21st century competencies. Similarly, Gouédard et al. (2020) joined in the alert that countries, including the OECD countries, consider curriculum reform as an important and necessary measure to make schools enter the 21st century and respond to a fast-changing world, adding that the reform is a way to equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences needed for tomorrow and to better prepare them. In the IFLA guidelines for professional library and information science (LIS) education programmes they authored, Chu and Raju et al. (2022) affirm that it is important to develop both disciplinary and cross-sector knowledge, which includes recognising commonalities libraries and information services share with related sectors, such as archives, museums, records management and data management, and developing complementary knowledge from cognate fields, such as computer science, data science, education, and communications. This view of Chu and Raju et al seems to be in tandem with the need to break down the insularity of a discipline into multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary where the lines between subjects are blurred, an idea also canvassed for by other authors.

Matusiak, Stansbury, and Barczyk (2014) in their communication of the United States perspective on educating a new generation of library and information science professionals, acknowledged the American Library Association (ALA) as the accrediting

agency responsible for reviewing and accrediting the LIS programs in the U.S. Relying on the opinion of the profession, the authors claim that ALA determines the scope of the Standards. In regards to the scope of the Master's degree curriculum, the Standard asserts that the curriculum, among others, emphasizes an evolving body of knowledge that reflects the findings of basic and applied research from relevant fields, integrates the theory, application, and use of technology, responds to the needs of a rapidly changing technological and global society, provides direction for future development of the field and promotes commitment to continuous professional growth. In Europe, Virkus (2008) asserts that in the last two decades an increasing interest in internationalization has been evident in library and information science (LIS) education. Virkus observed however that quite recently expansion and intensification of collaborative initiatives can be identified. She indicated that European LIS schools have started to participate more actively in joint activities in response to the challenges of globalization, to improve, innovate and strengthen the LIS curricula and courses to serve the changing needs of students and the global employment market, and to meet the international standards of quality in teaching, research and services.

Writing on the road to meeting the 21st Century challenges in LIS education in Bangladesh, Begum, and Elahi (2017) consider that the profession is in its most diversified form in this century where the librarians need to break the shackles of traditional approach and that the nature of education and training also needed to be upgraded. These authors confirm that the information scientists of Bangladesh have felt the necessity of modernizing the LIS curriculum to meet the challenges of 21st century. They note that the curriculum has extensively changed to incorporate the modern courses like integrated library management system, server administration, database management system, information architecture, data mining, web based applications for library services, programming languages and so on.

In Africa, some initiatives have also been observed in line with the global trend in LIS curricula and technological development. Ocholla and Bothma (2007) established in their study that LIS schools especially in Africa have, to a greater or lesser extent, been redesigning their curricula to keep track of the latest developments in the information world and keep their teaching market-related. They argue that common trends of LIS education are shared by most LIS schools in Africa. In Nigerian LIS education, Olubiyo (2022) chronicles the effort to address squarely and decisively the curricula. He affirms that the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) has made a gigantic effort by organizing a summit on Library School Curriculum Review and Development of Benchmarks in 2015 with the main aim of enriching the curriculum of library schools in Nigeria in line with the recent global best practices for library sustainability. He claims that lingering matters concerning course contents for LIS schools in Nigeria, facilities, nomenclature, staffing, location of LIS programmes, process of implementation of

benchmark, establishment of LIS programmes and accreditation were painstakingly deliberated upon by stakeholders at the summit. As a result of the summit, the LRCN is shouldering the responsibility of developing a unified curriculum for LIS schools in Nigeria which has passed through some stages. Much earlier, Nwosu, Eyisi, and Aghauche (2013) in a study had revealed the absence of uniformity and conformity in the LIS curricula in the universities studied. The implication of this is that some of the library schools were operating in solitude and conducting their programmes in silos. As if the lack of uniformity in the curricula of LIS schools studied was not bad enough, Saka, Garba, and Zarmai (2018) disclose that some universities and polytechnics are offering LIS diploma programmes that were not accredited. This scenario in Nigeria was also confirmed by Otike (2017) when he observed that LIS schools are mushrooming all over the continent. He raised the alarm that if the mushrooming trend is not checked, it could have a serious effect on the quality of the graduates. In order to mitigate this ill-wind, Smith (2012) advocates for increased accreditation of LIS programs and iSchools, whilst Otike's study supplicates that LIS schools will need to match the rapid changes taking place in the information industry.

In Botswana, a tracer study by Aina and Moahi (1999) sought to determine the relevance of the training of the graduates of LIS at the University of Botswana to their tasks and perceptions of the curriculum of the Department. The study advocated for the strengthening of the information technology component of the curriculum. Jain and Jorosi (2016) also did a study on LIS education at the University of Botswana. They noted that in order to equip future information professionals with the right skills and competencies for the current job market and to prepare them for the emerging global society, DLIS keeps reviewing its teaching curricula to introduce new programmes. The result of the investigation of the job market and emerging global society was the development of new programmes including winter programme, Bachelor of Information Systems programme for the curricula harmonisation; and Bachelor of Information and Knowledge Management (BIKM) programme. Though some efforts had been made at strengthening the IT component, but possibly for reasons of increasing technological advancement, Oladokun and Mooko (2023) still found that there was a lack of adequate knowledge to perform information technology and other salient tasks among the practising librarians most of who were within 5 years of graduation at the University of Botswana. Could it then be that the noticeable deficiency emanated from the LIS curricula they went through or inadequate effort on the part of the practising librarians? The authors argue that the librarians of the 21st century are required to work harder, learn more skills and perform new tasks. They also advocated for suitable continuing professional development which they consider as an adventure to keep current with developments in the profession and be reskilled for challenges that may rear up in the industry (Mooko and Oladokun, 2021).

In their study on the adequacy of LIS curriculum using Tanzanian universities as a case study, Mubofu and Mambo (2023) advocated for the need to align LIS education curriculum with global trends to ensure that graduates have the requisite skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the ever-evolving field. The authors highlight a number of subject areas that students need to be equipped with. These include: digital literacy, emerging technologies, user-centered services, and diversity, equity, and inclusion as critical areas requiring prioritization in the LIS curriculum. They also recommend the development of technical skills, soft skills, emerging technologies, and cultural competencies with practical training opportunities, real-world case studies, and industry partnerships. The study emphasizes the importance of information security and privacy, data management and analysis, collection development and management, marketing and outreach, digital humanities and scholarship, and accessibility and universal design in LIS education.

Writing on Library and Information Science (LIS) Education in the 21st Century: Emerging Skills for a Changing World, Olubiyo (2022) was emphatic that the rules and regulations to process resources are acquired from the academic world where the skills are being taught, to handle library information resources in a way that users can easily access them. After examining the core skills traditionally associated with LIS, he came up with some essential 21st century changing cross-sector skills comprising: IT skills, such as word-processing and spreadsheets, digitization skills, and conducting internet searches, loan systems, databases, content management systems, and specially designed programmes and packages. In the innovative age of information science and technology, Olubiyo holds to the firm belief that it is crucial for librarians to possess the necessary competencies for working in a specialized workplace, where the equipment and the clients' needs are changing rapidly. He concludes by asserting that LIS education should incorporate the modern information-processing skills for variety of the profession in a changing world of the 21st century. Much earlier, Varalakshmi (2006) in his submission on Educating 21st Century LIS Professionals – Needs and Expectations in a survey he carried out among LIS professionals and alumni in India, acknowledges that the past few decades have brought about revolutionary changes in information handling activities as a result of advances in information and communication technologies. He holds the view that such monumental changes demand new roles for library and information science (LIS) professionals. He therefore advocates that the twenty-first century information professional must possess skills in content management, knowledge management, organisation of information on intranets and the internet, research services, developing and maintaining digital libraries, and bringing information resources to the desktop. He insists that people with the right skills are crucial for success and competitiveness in contemporary information environments. The outcome of the effort could probably be seen in the study of Ocholla and Ocholla (2020) when they proclaim that academic

libraries in Africa are responding well to the revolution through their services, with remarkable innovation and creativity on display. Whilst agreeing to low scoring, they aver that emerging trends/services revealed libraries as publishers, use robotics and artificial intelligence, research commons, makerspace and research data services, among others. They advocate that in order to improve in accordance with the trends, academic libraries have to be better resourced, accessed and used, as well as improve web visibility. Of utmost significance to this study is the issue of accreditation of programmes, especially since it is considered a primacy at the DLIS of the University of Botswana to accredit its programmes. Though they confirmed that not all LIS education programmes worldwide are accredited, Chu and Raju et al. (2022) asserts LIS schools or units should seek accreditation of their programmes by appropriate local, national and/or international accreditation bodies. They also advocated that LIS programme should meet such educational/academic and professional accreditation requirements in the institution, within the norm of regulatory or accreditation bodies and cultural frameworks. Applegate (2022) affirms that accreditation serves two main functions: proving and improving. According to Applegate, accreditation standards and decisions “prove” to the public at large and to distinct consumers that a program is consistently achieving its publicly stated purposes. On the of planning process, Chu and Raju et al. proclaim that it should engage quantitative and qualitative evidence, and involve all stakeholders (such as professional bodies of the country, academic staff, students, and practitioners). They also suggest that equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) should drive programme development, including decolonisation and indigenisation of content and practice.

It is obvious as established in extant literature that the advocacy for realignment of LIS curricula is not peculiar to a section or a group, it is universal. Curiously, it is remarkable to note that indeed the clamour for reconceptualising and repositioning of curriculum generally is loud with such organisations as UNESCO and OECD. Good enough, scholars in curriculum development in LIS profession are also in the vanguard of not only advocating for change and realignment, but also taking steps to put advocacy into practice.

Methodology

The essay is based on literature review and the author’s experience and observation as a professional librarian/practitioner in academic libraries and as an educator in Library and Information Studies.

Discussion

With the vision to “become a leading centre of academic excellence in Africa in the education and training of information and knowledge management professionals” and the mission to “provide quality education and training that is driven by state-of-the-art information and

communications technology, research and publications” (DLIS Handbook, 2012), DLIS suffered a humiliation when its student could not gain direct admission to a UK university for higher degree programmes and its degree certification was downgraded to a diploma. DLIS decided a number of scholarly strategies should be put in place to ensure that LIS education and training in Botswana is uplifted to global level and never again disparaged. First, in line with the extant literature that suggests global outlook (Stabback, 2016; Marope, 2017), DLIS curricula must be subjected to comparison with similar curricula in other institutions within the region and internationally. The idea of providing a comparability matrix with other institutions at regional and international levels running similar programmes is also a requirement of Botswana Qualification Authority for a qualification or programme to be registered and/or approved. A typical example of a benchmarked programme is provided below

At the regional level, the UB Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) was benchmarked with the Master of Library and Information Studies at the University of Cape Town having 48 credits and provides learners with a broad foundation in areas of information organization, professional foundations, research, policy and management. At the international level, we benchmarked our MLIS mainly with similar programme in three institutions, namely Master of Information Science, McGill University, Canada which is worth 48 credits and prepares learners to manage change in a technologically oriented, knowledge-based environment. Second, MSc/ MA Library Science degree at the City University of London which is worth 165 credits and provides learners with a solid foundation in library and information sciences through a curriculum which teaches how information is stored, organized, researched, and retrieved. Third, Master of Science in Library and Information Science degree Syracuse University which is worth 36 credits and provides a solid framework of library science as well as knowledge, values, and skills of librarianship within the context of an interdisciplinary faculty was considered. Other qualifications offered in countries such as Australia, Nigeria and Kenya generally emphasize the development of competencies in research, management and the use of modern technological devices across the discipline. It is imperative to note that the institutions which DLIS benchmarked its programmes with were not selected on purpose. The desire, arising from global realignment, was to search for any institutions at the local, regional and international levels for benchmarking. It can therefore be said that the selected institutions merely emerged by default. For other DLIS programmes, the institutions selected at regional and international levels for comparability matrix were not necessarily those selected for master programme.

It is observed that though the qualifications examined generally follow similar structures and standards, there are significant differences in the credits allocated to mandatory courses, duration of experiential learning and the length of the research project or dissertation. DLIS

MLIS qualification generally compares well with all the qualifications studied since the exit outcomes cover similar scope and depth and are aligned to exit-level descriptors typical of this level and type of qualification as done within the region and beyond. Further to this, requisite competencies required for registration and accreditation with professional bodies such as American Library Association (ALA), Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and The Australian Library Association (ALIA) have been taken into account. Greatorex et al. (2019) opine that the process of curriculum mapping is to determine which curriculum features will serve as the basis of comparison. In a more detailed discourse, Adamson and Morris (2007: 263) argue that 'many stakeholders in education undertake comparisons of curricula'. They assert that Governments increasingly compare their states' curricula with overseas models when searching for new initiatives and when attempting to enhance international competitiveness; parents compare the offerings of schools in order to choose suitable institutions for their children; students look at the range of courses available when they select electives; and all parties except possibly the pupils make comparisons between current curricula and those which operated in earlier historical periods. Adamson and Morris further contend that all curriculum research involves some degree of comparison. The comparison of the UB DLIS curricula is in tandem with the views expressed above.

For purposes of approval and accreditation, DLIS programmes are locally approved and accredited by Botswana Qualification Authority as earlier indicated. Beyond this, DLIS has also approached the UK Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) with a view to accrediting the LIS programmes on offer. As CILIP directed, DLIS opened up discussion with ENIC - the United Kingdom National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills, with a view to meeting the requirement which was considered paramount before CILIP could accredit programmes. Chu and Raju et al. (2022) advocate that LIS schools or units should seek accreditation of their programmes by appropriate local, national and/or international accreditation bodies. Determined not to fall victim of operating in silos as noted of some institutions in the literature, DLIS is working with the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) of the University of Botswana to ensure DLIS is affiliated to iSchools and registered with other professional organisations like International Council on Archives (ICA), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES). At the time of this writing, CAD is already at work to ensure DLIS membership of iSchools. Opportunities offered by the professional bodies' guarantee opening up and ensuring non-vulnerability of the products of DLIS. For example, as a global organisation, iSchools leadership from each region meets regularly to discuss challenges and opportunities globally as well as topics common to their area. Regional approaches to education, research and other matters are described in the regional subpages (iSchools, 2024). Among other benefits,

membership of iSchools ensures connecting schools and researchers in the field of information science worldwide; promoting their collaboration, exchange, and support. Each region also maintains its own sub-network that focuses on issues that are of interest to that region. Smith (2012) had advocated for increased collaboration with iSchools. As if in response to the call, Matusiak, Stansbury, and Barczyk (2014) indicated there are many LIS Schools that are members of iSchools in the US. They acknowledge that the iSchool group offer more courses and new concentrations, but non-iSchools have a higher number of concentrations. iSchools tend to have larger programs with Bachelor's degrees and PhDs, whilst when Master's programs are considered, both groups appear to be similar.

Further, DLIS abides by the mandate to review its curricula every five years. Prior to carrying out the internal review, at least two international scholars from Africa and Europe are brought to Botswana to go through DLIS programmes and curricula vis-à-vis the international standards. The report generated assists DLIS in its five-yearly programme review. At the local level, the stakeholders, including the employers of our products, are usually involved and their interventions welcome in the plan. Marope (2017) corroborates these exertions when she states that credible curricula processes are necessarily inclusive and consultative involving professional, local, national, and global communities at large. On the issue of periodic curriculum review which DLIS holds every five years, Dyjur, Grant, and Kalu (2019) in their write up on continuous improvement of curriculum suggest that iterative process should be conducted every 5-7 years. DLIS has had to beef up its curricula by strengthening the IT components, information and knowledge management, and incorporating the emerging technologies, introducing e-cataloguing and classification and a number of courses found through scholarly communication, especially, on social media application, internet website construction, cultural and multicultural competencies, among others. These are the areas where DLIS had suffered some deficiencies. Writing on curriculum review process, Minnetonka Public Schools (2020) avers that the goal of review process is to advance the quality of curriculum and instruction and to promote excellence in student performance using the best possible instructional practices, curricula, and materials.

Conclusion and recommendations

To appropriately equip LIS students with the right knowledge, skills and competencies to be marketable internationally and meet the demand of modern times, it is important that harmony is built in LIS curricula worldwide through scholarly communication. LIS Schools should ensure that their curricula are effectively comparable with what operates elsewhere. This calls for alertness of library school operators and the need to review, change or redesign their curricula possibly within a space of five years to incorporate new developments, including learners' experience, in the information world and keep their teaching market-related. As Chu and Raju et al. suggest, the review should also include

evolving technologies impacting LIS professional practice, new trends/innovations, and anticipated changes in LIS and cognate fields as well as in broader society. A library school that resigns itself to solitary existence in curriculum development, will not only be humbled and embarrassed of its inadequacy often and again, but will also frustrate their products when competed in the job market and other opportunities. LIS schools that operate in silos will succeed in exposing the vulnerability of not only the school, but also the students who entrust their destiny in the hands of such institutions. A product of an institution that dodges professional tasks and cannot compete with their peers in market related issues cannot be a pride of their institutions. Robust education and training programmes will equip the students with the right skills. These programmes can only be guaranteed through scholarly communication, comparability system and adhering to the consultative suggestions of the stakeholders. It is abhorrent for a library school in its curricula to close up to generated research publications, scholarly writings and other scholarly works obtained in other schools through scholarly communication, operate independently and avoid sharing information as well. The school that operates in silos will eventually find out it is out of tune with the demand of the times and operating in 'a world that no longer exists'. The Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Botswana had encountered some of the ugly issues and jettisoned them in favour of commitment to fostering inclusivity in global repositioning of its curricula through scholarly communication and consultation. DLIS is never shy of borrowing useful vessels by introducing relevant new courses found in other LIS schools. The process of global realignment of LIS curricula guarantees the principle of uniformity and consistency required in the education and training of professionals irrespective of the institution of training. It safeguards and opens the corridor for acceptance, ease of continuity in training and marketability for the trained professionals.

As this essay concludes, a note of thoughtfulness should be ingrained to this discourse. Whilst internationalization of LIS curricula is being advocated and adhered to, it is also important that the values cherished in various regions of the world are incorporated into the curricula. Lankes (2011: 177) clearly specifies that "It is in education that we instill our values and our worldview, in addition to the skills needed by communities". The issue of decolonizing research is gradually warming its way back to the front burner of study. It is therefore important that various regions should not ignore placing concerns and worldviews on non-Western individuals in LIS research. In Africa, for instance, the place of aphorisms, incantations, parables, proverbs, folktales, folklores, myths and idioms, as cherished values to impart knowledge and ideas should be given a pride of place in LIS curriculum and research. Stabback (2016) also echoes the view that curriculum should be seen as representing a conscious and systematic selection of knowledge, skills and values.

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