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Kenneth K. Rotich

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GLOBAL POSTCARDS COLUMN



Jacqueline Solis, Director of Research and Instructional Services, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA and Robin L. Kear, Liaison Librarian, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the Global Postcards column! We have two postcards for you in this issue related to library and information science education. The first postcard evaluates the effectiveness of curriculum in Library and Information Science Schools in Kenya to train Systems Librarians. The second postcard analyzes the status, issues, and challenges for library and information science faculty in Pakistan. If you would like to send a submission for a future column, please contact either of the column's co-editors: Jacqueline Solis, jsolis@email.unc.edu, and Robin Kear, rlk25@pitt.edu.

Investigating the Relevance of Library Information Science Curriculum to Systems Librarians at Kenya's Schools of Information Sciences

Kenneth K. Rotich

Library, Egerton University, Nakuru, Kenya

ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the effectiveness of the current curriculum and methodologies used in Schools of information Sciences as a tool to train Systems Librarians in Kenya. It examined the current curricula used by selected Library and Information Schools (LIS) in Kenya, established the content of Information Communication Technology (ICT) courses that are offered in LIS curricula in Kenya, and its relevance to needs. It used a case study of four universities in Kenya that offer LIS education. The study used descriptive case study design to collect data on issues related to LIS curricula as they are at present in the selected universities in Kenya through analysis and comparison curriculum used. In the study, the dependent variable is Systems Librarians while the independent variables include schools of information Sciences in Kenya and LIS curriculum. The study was carried out in selected Universities that teach Library and Information Sciences in Kenya. The study used purposive sampling technique to show accurate, reliable, and valid information from a more representative of all the population who are involved in the developing and implementing the curriculum as well as those who employ the Systems Librarians. The findings show that curricula used by LIS schools in Kenya do not have adequate Information Communication Technology courses to equip those aspiring to be Systems Librarians with adequate skills to carry out their mandate effectively. It shows that there are more general courses that are covered that are not helpful to the students. The study recommends that LIS curricula be reviewed to address the shortcomings noted by increasing the number of ICT courses, benchmarking with universities in developed countries, establish a model LIS for Systems Librarians and standardize curricula for LIS.

KEYWORDS

Library and information science education; systems librarians

Introduction

The relevance of a curriculum in any discipline plays a critical role in developing the competencies of graduates in that particular field. Thus, for Systems Librarians to have core competencies in the Information Communication Technology and Librarianship, they need to undergo a training in Library and information Schools (LIS) which

have a comprehensive curriculum covering both fields. Though Dorrian (1998) argues that the position of system librarian developed more by accidents than by design, the same cannot hold today. Library and information sciences schools (LIS) are intentionally developing curricula which gears toward the production of Systems Librarians (Dorrian, 1998). What is in doubt is

Table 1. Universities which offers LIS education in Kenya.

Moi University	Karatina University
Kenyatta University	Meru University of Science and Technology
Egerton University	Inooneo University
Kisii University	Mount Kenya University
Laikipia University	Kenya Methodist University
Technical University of Kenya	Catholic University of East Africa
Maasai Mara University	

whether the curriculum being used by LIS in Kenya is appropriate to instill adequate skills for the graduates to be able to perform systems work in the library.

Libraries have experience continued growth in application of ICT in delivering library services which necessitates the need for an effective curriculum in LIS. With this growth the need for specialization within LIS profession emerged. This gave rise to the need of personnel who are having specific competencies in Systems Librarianship (Engard & Gordon, 2012).

In United States the shortcomings in LIS curriculum meeting the needs of Systems Librarians was recognized way back in 1994 (Thompson, 2009). This was further supported by Xu & Cheng (2001) who found out that LIS schools had not played sufficient role in training Systems Librarians. Though the situation has changed in developed countries since then, there is no evidence of the same in developing countries such as Kenya and therefore the need for this study.

In Kenya, several Universities have established LIS. Studies show that there are over 10 universities offering LIS education in Kenya (Bii & Rukwaro, 2016; Otike, 2012). The Universities are listed in Table 1 below:(Table 1):

Despite the number of Universities offering LIS education that keeps growing in Kenya, recent studies shows that graduates are inadequately prepared in ICT skills (Kavulya, 2007; Makori, 2012). Kavulya further observes that current LIS programmes in Kenya do not address the current job market requirements due to inadequate teaching resources at LIS training. This position raises the question as to whether the curricula that are used by these LIS are well thought out and comprehensive enough to instill the required competencies to students who are aspiring to become Systems Librarians. Thus, this study will investigate the appropriateness of the curricula used by these universities.

Statement of the problem

Curriculum is an invaluable tool in any academic programme as it guides the faculty members guiding them on which areas to cover. Curriculum therefore acts as road map to be followed in equipping the students with the necessary knowledge and skills to have the needed competencies in a given field. Ideally the curriculum should help both faculty and students understand what is required on them to fulfill the objectives of the programmes.

LIS curriculum for Systems Librarian should therefore be geared toward producing librarians who have competencies in both librarianship and ICT skills. Lack of effective curriculum for Systems Librarians in LIS means that the library will not play its pivotal role in ensuring that there are high quality services offered to library users. Systems Librarians are expected also play critical role the use of ICT in the library. There are tools such as Integrated Library Systems, digital library software, discovery tools, remote access software among others that Systems Librarians are expected to implement and maintain. These tools can also be effectively implemented and maintain if there are Systems Librarians who possess the required ICT competencies.

As a result of lack of competently trained Systems Librarians, many libraries in Kenya are forced to depend on the services of consultants to implement and maintain software in libraries. In other instances, libraries are forced to use computer science graduates. Though these graduates are well grounded in Information Technology, they are faced with limitation in that they do not understand librarianship and therefore cannot adequately articulate issues that cover both computers and librarians.

Thus, there appears to be critical elements that are missing in LIS curriculum. To address the short comings of LIS curriculum, the LIS schools, which are best placed to develop and implement an effective curriculum, critically examined and solution sought so that they can play their role effectively. This study will therefore seek to come up with a recommended curriculum that will address the needs of students who aspire to work as Systems Librarians.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to enable the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the current curriculum used in Schools of Information Sciences as a tool to train Systems Librarians in Kenya.

Objectives of the study

The study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Examine the current curricula used by selected LIS schools in Kenya.
- Establish the number of no of ICT courses that are offered in LIS curricula in Kenya.
- Establish the core competencies that are required of Systems Librarians.
- Determine the relevance of current LIS curricula to the needs of Systems Librarians in Kenya.

Research questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the contents of curricula used in LIS schools to train Systems Librarians?
- What ICT courses are offered in the LIS curricula?
- What are the core competencies that are required for Systems Librarians to have?

Significance of the study

Universities which offer LIS programmes will greatly benefit from this study as they will understand the needs of Systems Librarians and therefore incorporate the areas that will be suggested in the study in their curriculum.

Conceptual framework

From the Figure 1 above Systems Librarians depend on several factors. Systems Librarians depend on Library and Information Science Schools to acquire the necessary skills to enable them to perform their roles. On the other hand, the LIS schools need to have an effective

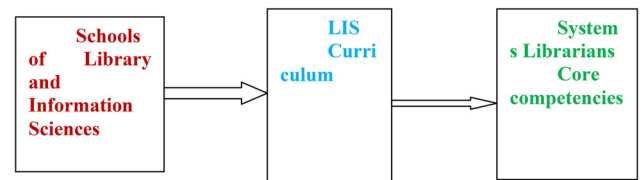


Figure 1. Conception framework.

curriculum to impart the necessary competencies to students who aspire to become Systems Librarians.

Literature review

Libraries are increasingly recognizing the important role played by Systems/ICT librarians. This is due to increase use of information technology to manage various services in the library. In recognition of this development, the study attempts to investigate whether the current staff in charge of ICTs in the library has the necessary skills to implement and manage any automation project.

According to Jordan (2003), a Systems Librarian is a librarian “who is responsible for managing the information technology used in a library”. Systems Librarian therefore holds a critical role within the academic library through overseeing the computer technology serving the library staff and patrons (Foote, 1997).

In the study entitled “What do employers expect? Educating Systems Librarian” Xu and Chen (1999) explore the critical role of Systems Librarians in systems implementation. The study identifies critical role of Systems Librarian as:

- Automation duties
- Management of library’s integrated systems
- Computer hardware
- Software installation and maintenance
- Local Area Network administration
- Training library staff

It also identified the skills required of Systems Librarian required to effectively carryout their duties. These skills include:

- Work experience in area of technology
- Knowledge of hardware and software platforms
- Computer-related skills
- Operating systems

- Telecommunications
- World wide web

Engard (2004) in his study on entitled “Accidental Systems Librarian” identifies the core competencies that are required of a Systems Librarian. He describes the Systems Librarian as a unique breed because they have to be knowledgeable in both libraries and computers as well as integrate the two fields in context. Engard considers the role of Systems Librarian as managing any one or more of library systems. Such systems may include website, Integrated Library System, public and staff computers, library content application, and library hardware. The study further lists the areas of competencies that Systems Librarians are required to have. They include:

- Database languages, that is, MySQL and PostgreSQL
- Programming Languages like PHP and Perl
- Network basics and
- Linux server management basics

The study by Engard is very useful for LIS schools in that it highlights areas that they need to concentrate on as they design and implement suitable curricula for those aspiring to be Systems Librarian.

Methodology

This study used descriptive case study design as it is suitable in situations where fact finding and existing state of affairs are required. This design therefore enabled the researcher to collect data on issues related to LIS curricula as they are at present in the selected universities in Kenya through the use of content analysis. Through the descriptive design, the researcher was able to collect data that was used to describe the state of affairs and gain deeper insight on various issues to do with LIS education. The study used purposive sampling technique. This study will be carried out in selected in all the Universities that teach Library and Information Sciences in Kenya. The study used four universities as case studies namely Moi University, Kenyatta University,

Table 2. Courses offered at Moi University for LIS Students specializing in IT.

Total No of Units	No of Units in IT
57	22

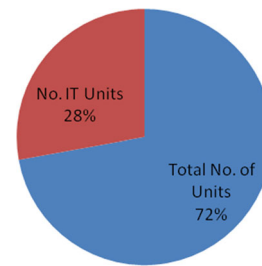


Figure 2. Representation in percentage for Moi University.

Egerton University and Technical University of Kenya. The study analyzed the current LIS curriculum as currently used in the four universities.

Results

From the analysis of the LIS curricula of the four universities under study, a number of findings came out. The study revealed that of the total 57 units covered by students who choose to specialize in LIS Information Technology (IT) option at the undergraduate level only 22 units are in the areas of IT. This represents only 28% of the entire unit courses taught (Table 2, Figure 2).

Egerton University on the other hand students specializing in IT covers 15 units out of 48 units offered representing 24% (Table 3, Figure 3).

Technical University of Kenya (TUK) likewise covers 15 units out of 62 units in IT related field representing 19%. The study shows that there no specialization in IT at TUK (Table 4, Figure 4).

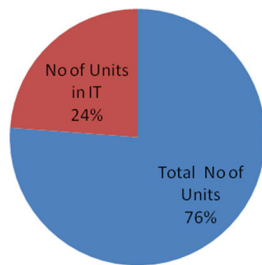
Kenyatta University offers only 9 units in IT out of the total courses offered representing 15% (Table 5, Figure 5).

Of the four Universities chosen as case studies only two universities have the provision whereby students choose to specialize in LIS Information Technology option, that is, Moi and Egerton University. In both institutions specialization options are available from third year of study.

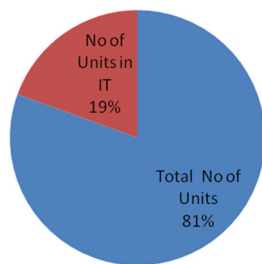
There is lack of standardization in terms of the minimum number of IT related units that are offered in the LIS curricula from one university to another. From the findings Moi University offers 22 units, Egerton and Technical

Table 3. Courses offered at Egerton University for LIS Students specializing in IT.

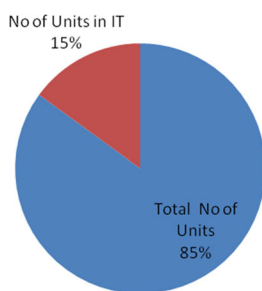
Total No of Units	No of Units in IT
48	15

**Figure 3.** Representation for Egerton University.**Table 4.** Courses offered at Technical University of Kenya for LIS Students specializing in IT.

Total No of Units	No of Units in IT
62	15

**Figure 4.** Representation for Technical University of Kenya.**Table 5.** Courses offered at Kenyatta University for LIS Students specializing in IT.

Total No of Units	No of Units in IT
51	9

**Figure 5.** Representation for Kenyatta University.

Universities each offer 15 units while Kenyatta University offers 9 units.

Conclusion

Though several Universities have content in their curricula that address the skills required for

Systems Librarians, the study on the selected curricula of LIS schools in Kenya shows that LIS education offered in a number of universities in Kenya does not effectively address the skills required for Systems Librarians. This is evident from the ration of IT courses offered in comparison to the total number offered. There are many general courses in LIS curricula which are not relevant to those aspiring to become Systems Librarians. This tends to water down the richness in IT specialization.

Recommendations

There is need for LIS curricula to be reviewed to accommodate fully the need of Systems Librarians. LIS schools should do more benchmarking with established universities across the globe that are known to offer relevant ICT skills in order to build capacity for those aspiring to become Systems Librarians. There is need to identify one LIS school to serve as a model for training Systems Librarians. The number of general courses should be reduced and in their place IT courses be introduced. LIS schools in Kenya should come up with common units that should be covered in LIS curricula in order to offer effective training for Systems Librarians.

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