

BRIEF COMMUNICATION

Library and Information Science Education in Ethiopia

Dr. Lawrence Abraham Gojeh* Getachew Bayissa**

Abstract

Production of qualified librarians or information specialists with adequate theoretical knowledge and practical skills in applications of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is found to be a strategic asset that will bring about significant development and changes in any nation's economy, politics, education, agriculture and other national sectors of the economy. Thoughts that influenced the direction of curriculum and the development of library and information science education in Ethiopia were discussed. The Jimma University Department of information studies' curriculum and its development was specifically highlighted with reference to the core; supportive, common and education courses of the program. Plans for the future development of the program in Jimma University were also mentioned.

* (Assistant professor) Department of Information Studies Faculty of Natural and Information Science, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia
E-mail: gojehla@yahoo.com

* Department of Information Studies Faculty of Natural and Information Science, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia
E-mail: Ghetachew@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

The availability of information professionals in the Ethiopian market seems to be having a problem. The growth and development of information providers in the country have been neglected by both current and former regimes. School library development has never been given attention and lately even declined despite the introduction of Mass Education Policy that advocates learner and resources based education for primary, secondary and tertiary level education. Policies currently being implemented in Ethiopia may not be promising but due to the expected great active role of library and information science profession in the country's educational, social, political and cultural spheres; great attention is being focused by government on library and information science education in the country.

Production of qualified librarians or information specialists with adequate theoretical knowledge and practical skills in applications of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is found to be a strategic asset that will bring about significant development and changes in any nation's economy, politics, education, agriculture and other national sectors of the economy. Hence, examining the curriculum and the development of library and information science education in Ethiopia becomes very critical. It is therefore, the intention of this article to review some of the thoughts that have influenced the direction of the development of library and information science education in Ethiopia with special reference to the curriculum of Jimma University Department of Information Studies.

Historical Overview of Library Education

When Melvil Dewey opened the first library school at Columbia University in 1887, the core curriculum was designed to provide students with a set of professional skills to assist users in their various institutional environments; as more complex skills and specialized knowledge is demanded of the librarianship profession (Halsey et. al.: 2006). The skills; which requires information handling to take a unique professional responsibility, and teaching efficient ways to acquire, organize, preserve and circulate approved and legitimate kinds of information to the users, were dependent on technology of the 19th century innovations. International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), in its Standards for Library Schools; stated that the core curriculum should consist of the fundamental subjects that all students should master first. While the traditional core curriculum for the library and information science should include book selection, cataloging and classification, reference work, administration and management of libraries, history of books and libraries, research methods, and libraries in the society (including communication). This is in line with the importance attached to information as a commodity of value.

Information became a key strategic issue for effective and sustainable development of any type of organization in the modern society (Tadesse & Bayou: 2000). Recent advancements and applications of information systems and technologies have transformed the structure of the international and national economies, leading to new methods and practices in most organizational systems and academic institutions. This is due to the fact that the development of competent information providers and information professionals is the key element in the provision of the basis through which all citizens can effectively communicate, thereby facilitating the achievement of the information/knowledge society in developed and developing countries.

The introduction and use of computer technology has expanded the knowledge base for library and information science education. Harvey (1987) emphasized the need for a systematic and comprehensive curriculum design at the plan of any library and information science education to avoid “hodge-podge of the past”. The comprehensive curriculum, which today introduces the use of computer technology, allows the profession to use technology to solve information problems and it emphasizes specialization in library practice and the introduction of elective courses. The diverse range of professional opportunities has expanded the knowledge and skills that graduates must possess.

Library and Information Science program provides professional education for a wide variety of service and management careers in libraries, information centers and the like. In Ethiopia, the education of librarians and information specialists can be said to be taking shape in recent times; academic institutions like Jimma University and Haramaya University have now established Department of Information Studies. The curriculum is based on present and probable future characteristics of information professions, emphasizing the essential knowledge, skill, and professional attitude needed by trainees in these fields.

Library Curriculum Development in Ethiopia

The development of Library and Information Science Education in Ethiopia can be traced back to the Department of Library Science of Addis Ababa University (AAU). The Department produced Diploma and Degree graduates from the late 1950's under the Faculty of Education. Two programs (diploma and degree) were started simultaneously in the Education faculty then; one of the programs was a minor in Library Science for Secondary Education degree students who majored in academic subjects and the second program was a Diploma in Library Science, which was offered as a full-time course of one academic year and as a two-and-a-half year part-time course in the Extension program.

The programs were discontinued in the Education Faculty of the AAU, but the Addis Ababa University Libraries (AAUL), which is a library and information service Department in AAU, did not allow the program to be cancelled, hence, it took over the hosting from 1966. Tefera (2000) revealed that AAUL had hosted the academic programs of library science for 27 Years (1966-1994). The diploma in library science was hosted from 1966-1994, while the Degree in library science was from 1989-1994. The curriculum for the Diploma in library science had 50% practical sessions and consisted of 36 credit hours of major courses such as classification, cataloguing, periodicals, circulation, binding, and reference service and library administration. Other courses were more of “introductory and theoretical in nature. They were instructional media/technology, collection development, library management, reference services and bibliography. All the courses which were both practice-oriented and theoretically based were the responsibility of the academic staff of the AAUL.

Curriculum Changes at AAU

The conference of Ethiopian Higher Learning in Institutions held in Ambo in 1978, made the recommendation among others; that a degree program in library science should be evolved in AAU. By 1987, the curriculum for the Degree Program in Library and Information science was first designed and submitted to the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review (ASCR) of AAU. It was once again revised and submitted in 1988 under the name "Syllabus for Bachelor's Degree in Library

Science". (The term 'information' was dropped from the title of the program upon the decision of the ASCR, on the ground that the name of the Department did not have the same term in it.) The final version of the syllabus was approved and was in use from 1989 along with the commencement of the Degree Program. However, the courses were: classification, cataloguing, collection development, bibliography, archives and records management, information technology, senior essay, library and information systems management. The program was offered both in the regular and extension programs. At the time of AAUL hosting the Department of library science, it produced 700 diploma and 92 degree candidates with library science profession respectively.

The program was transferred from the AAUL to the School of Information Science for Africa (SISA) and the nomenclature of the program was changed to "Bachelor's Degree in Library and Information Science (LIS)" in 1997. The curriculum content covered major areas of Library and Information Science courses with 57 credit hours. The Minor area was in Computer Science courses with 24 credit hours and general courses with 54 credit hours. The overall program adds up to 135 credit hours.

Revision of the undergraduate curriculum was launched again in 1997 by the AAU with the formation of the self-assessment and Peer Assessment Committees. Following the assessment, and as per the requirement of the program the curriculum was reviewed and approved from 1st to 2nd July 1999. On the basis of the profiles of the graduates, the agreement to drop the Minor in Computer Science program, the incorporation of computer related courses in the major and the changing trends of the profession, the nomenclature of the program was changed to Bachelor of Science Degree in Information Systems. This was in realization of the nation's and regional Information and Communication Technology capacity building program to enhance the introduction of certain areas of specialization into the revised curriculum of the library and information science education. Since this idea was highly appreciated and strongly recommended by most of the major stakeholders and the concerned management bodies of the University, the following three streams were proposed and incorporated into the revised curriculum in March 2002.

The Department was again transformed into a Today Department of Information System establishes over the Department of Library and Information Science under the Faculty of Informatics. However, the manpower output from this Department automatically moved to other sector activities and became very small. The need for market diversification and job opportunities in the market may have forced new thinking in LIS education in Ethiopia with particular reference to AAU. However, SISA engaged in wrong transformation and survival driven strategy excluding LIS education and LIS curriculum began to face new challenges.

AAU's School of Informatics has in recent times; disregarded library and information science by giving it a new face. Whether we will be safe in preserving our traditional profession 'librarianship' by giving it a new face with terms like Cybrarianship (i.e. hybrid, digital, electronic or virtual libraries) or by courageously exploring the turbulent; often amorphous and highly competitive field in the name of 'emerging professions or markets?' This seems to be an open question. It is believed that the definition of market and interpretation of the market will be well thought of to dictate the decision on the suitable option to be taken for LIS education in the future.

Present day discussions in the Ethiopian Information Science literature continue to center on conceptualization of types of library and information science education programs to be set up, re-orientation and curriculum review. The demand for competency in technology has led to the proliferation of training programs in information technology, leaving out other information areas. The Bachelor of Science in Information System Launched by the AAU is the recent situation. Some 'technophobes' who took the curriculum through drastic restructuring involving name and content change have taken untimely approach to the academic dispensation. The popularity of this program demonstrates the increasing interest in Information Technology in the country.

The various considerations informed the need for the development of new programs and the need for curriculum development and review that comprises a strong component of information management. At the same time, a harmonized program with relevant core courses is essential for serving a wide range of information needs in the country. Technological knowledge is highly relevant in a civilized and urban-centric world but this is poorly served in Ethiopia. Thus, the new Curriculum will help the hitherto untrained practitioners who constitute the majority librarians in Ethiopia with broad-based information services knowledge and skills. In other words, library and information science education in Ethiopia should go through recreation and transformation.

Establishment of Department of Information Studies in Jimma University

Jimma University was established in 1983 and one of the youngest among the eight public universities in Ethiopia. The university's academic activities and programs are conducted in 8 faculties and 61 programs. The mission of the university is to provide tertiary education and to pursue knowledge, which serves the needs of the country in general and those of the surrounding communities in particular. The Department of Information Studies started with a nomenclature "Department of Library and Information Science" but changed to Department of Information Studies in 2007. The Department falls under the Faculty of Natural and Information Science.

Jimma University developed a baccalaureate science degree curriculum entitled Information Studies. It is a new branch of undergraduate study that is distinct from other university's programs and to describe the principles of the new demand to the curriculum of library and information science education.

The undergraduate professional degree program centers on how the artifact of human knowledge are structured, organized, managed, evaluated, and made accessible. The university believes that Information Studies (IS) and newly emerging related fields must be taught together since the technical, humanistic, social, and behavioral aspects of information studies are interrelated. An understanding of users must guide information systems design, just as knowledge of technical possibilities and constraints must shape user services. The history, policy, and economic contexts of information creation and dissemination are also essential elements.

Information Studies Curriculum at Jimma University

The survey conducted on stakeholders and professionals by the Jimma University library system revealed that there are differences among the various levels of need in information-based personnel, covering requirements at the general education and specialized technician level to professional engineers and information specialists. The report catalog a considerable detail of the knowledge-base and skills set for the Department to prefer its graduates to cluster around as specialists' librarians, systems/business analysts, database administrators, computer support specialists, network specialists, telecommunications analysts, and internet specialists.

Based on the survey report conducted on stakeholders and professionals by the Jimma University library system; its first task is to create the curricula for the new degree programs, building on the models available in other Universities in the world with the like-named degrees, but holding on to the goals set by the curriculum review report. The courses were design as: core; supportive, common and education courses (Faculty of Natural and Information Sciences: 2005)

A curriculum being a fundamental part of any education or training programs, provides not only a list of courses or modules offered in a program, but it also gives information on content, purpose, method, time and duration, trainers and location or situation of a program or course - all of which are essential in a successful dispensation of manpower training and education.

Program Goals and Objectives

The Bachelor of Science Degree in Information Studies is aimed at producing new graduates to satisfy the scarce skilled human power of the country and pay a concern to insufficient emphasis on information resource centers, services and its sciences, which would have played a great role in the country's academic revolution. The challenge also, is broaden horizons and to sharpen skills that will be important as the student matures as a professional and alleviate the country's skilled human resource in the sector. The objectives of the information studies program are to:

1. Produce skilled professional human resource that can plan, design, develop, organize, and manage modern and traditional information resource centers/agencies in the country.
2. Understand the relationship among society, people, organizations, and technology and identify the implications for managing and using information technology in the information resource centers and information agencies through management skills, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making and appropriate for the workplace.
3. Assume a leadership role in traditional and interdisciplinary research and scholarship that address information issues.
4. Educate within and for a rapidly changing technological world and understand how technology is reshaping and affecting information resource centers/agencies and the profession.
5. Prepare students to understand the interactions between social factors and information environments.
6. Create understanding of the historical, social, cultural, educational, political, and economic dimensions of information on information resource centers and agencies.

7. Create understanding of the role of information technologies, services and organizations in globalization.
8. Teach and foster professional attitudes and information service philosophy.
9. Participate in the development activities of the community and community organizations.

Graduates profile

The graduates' profiles of the program are to:

1. have a solid academic base in terms of general and specific subjects that can serve as the foundation for Information Studies;
2. be equipped and qualified with the knowledge of various types of information resources, systems and services;
3. be equipped and qualified with the knowledge of theories, principles, processes and techniques of organization, storage, retrieval, dissemination and utilization of all forms of information;
4. be equipped and qualified with the knowledge of theories, practices and principles of information systems analysis, design, development and management;
5. be equipped and qualified with the knowledge of designing, programming, implementing and evaluation of various information systems and multimedia resources including the Internet;
6. be equipped and qualified with the knowledge of computers and communication systems, including, network design, development, implementation and management;
7. be equipped and qualified with the basic principles of ICT in information processing techniques.

Major skills and competencies of the graduate

The Major skills and competencies of the graduates shall be as follows:

1. To analyze, design, develop, implement and manage ICT based information systems, services and solutions (organization and retrieval of information resources);
2. To generate and produce tangible and useable information services and products;
3. To manage information resource centers and agencies system development projects;
4. To provide information system/technology consultancy services;
5. To create and develop practical projects related to information resources and services.

Future plans for the Information Studies Department in Jimma University

The Department of Information Studies has graduated its first batch of students in June 2008. Regardless of its infancy the department has envisioned a strategic plan that adopts the educational philosophy of Jimma University '*Community-oriented Education*' and '*Problem Based Learning*'. The Community oriented or Community-based education is a learning activity that involves the students, teachers, the community, and all other stakeholders in the community and follows a problem solving approach that starts with the identification of community problems, setting of objectives, plan of action implementation of plans and monitoring and evaluating progresses. The 'problem based learning focuses on developing the problem solving capacity of learners through promoting skills in understanding and solving problems that can be real or simulated (Jimma University: 2004). There will be regular program review that would be backed with appropriate funding by putting in place planned

accreditation processes for its program; although such requirements are not mandatory and less known about at this moment in Ethiopian tertiary level education.

The academic development of the program will address social responsibility, diversity, technology skills, and research, provide personal study through supervised practicum, professional field experiences, and independent work, including projects, research, and publications; provide students with opportunities for collaborative research with faculty and collaborative projects with different programs within and outside the country. Staff development will be enhanced with appropriate physical facilities and technological support for productive learning and teaching environment for students and staff of the program.

Conclusion

This paper gives a brief development of library and information science education in Ethiopia. It examined library education in AAU and its present status. Jimma University Department of Information Studies detailed curriculum, goals, objectives, graduates profile, major skills and competencies were outlined along with its future plans.

REFERENCES

- Faculty of Natural and Information Science. (2005). **Curriculum Specification for Faculty of Natural and Information Science Programmes**. Jimma University.
- Harvey, John F. (1987). Curriculum Development Policies and Practices. (In). **Internationalizing Library and Information Science Education: A Handbook of Policies and Procedures in Administration and Curriculum** (Ed). John F. Harvey and Frances Laverne Carroll. New York: Greenwood Press. Pp. 161-84
- Harsey, R.S.; Moran, B.B.; Goldberg, B.; Lane, N.D.; Aman, M.M.; Ikem, J.E.et.al. (2006). Library (Institution). In **Microsoft Encarta. 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation**.
- Jimma University (2004). **CBE Guideline**. Jimma University)
- Tadesse, Neguissie & Bayou, Abiyot. (2000). Interview with Professor Girma Mullisa. (In). **Addis Ababa University Libraries in Perspective: 50th years Golden Jubilee Aniversary**. Addis Ababa: AAUL. Pp.15-19.
- Tefera, Solomon. (2000). The Contribution of Addis Ababa University Library System to the Development of Library Studies in Ethiopia. (In). **Addis Ababa University Libraries in Perspective: 50th years Golden Jubilee Aniversary**. Addis Ababa: AAUL. Pp.24-25.