Library and Information Science education in Anglophone Africa: Past, present and future

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the historical development of Library and Information Science (LIS) schools on the African continent from the colonial period to the present. It highlights the factors that contributed to the growth of library schools and challenges experienced in their development. This study was based entirely on literature review and the author's extensive knowledge, teaching experience and research in LIS education in Africa. Information was obtained from both published and non-published sources. Colleagues in LIS education also contributed immensely to the outcome of the work. It was found that the earliest schools were initially known as library schools. The term changed to LIS schools much later, after independence. Library schools started in the colonial era, initially in South Africa, moving all the way through West Africa to East Africa. The curricula used in the schools were based on programmes prevailing in the mother country. Unesco played an important role in the development of library schools on the continent. It came up with the concept of regional library schools. Public and academic libraries were instrumental in agitating for the establishment of library schools. With the onset of independence on the continent, the concept of regional schools died, giving rise to self-sufficiency. Currently, LIS schools are mushrooming all over the continent. It is concluded that if this trend is not checked, it could have a serious effect on the quality of the graduates. Although the future of LIS schools is bright, it will greatly depend on how the library profession is marketed. LIS schools will need to match the rapid changes taking place in the information industry.

Keywords: Africa, East Africa School of Librarianship, Library and information science education, library schools, library education, schools of information sciences

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the development of Library and Information Science (LIS) education on the African Continent. However since it is next to impossible to cover the entire continent, the discussion will be confined to the English-speaking parts of Africa. The reason is that librarianship and in particular LIS education on the continent has been influenced by the situation in the countries that colonised Africa. Each colonial power approached librarianship differently; this greatly affected the discipline in the colonies, Africa inclusive. In terms of library development, Africa can be divided into four language blocks, namely, Anglophone, Francophone, Arab, and Lusophone.

LIS education in the past

Until after independence, LIS education in most African countries was more concerned with training in librarianship. LIS education aimed at producing competent librarians to manage all types of libraries in the country. Other information related disciplines such as documentation, archives and records management were relatively unknown; where they existed, they were not accorded prominence. Librarianship in Africa owes its origin to colonialism. Colonialism introduced reading and writing among the indigenous people. Until then, the two activities were alien. Colonial governments introduced Western education which entailed among others, reading and writing. In an attempt to boost the two activities, a need was felt to

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provide the new literates with information materials, basically books, to further their reading and writing skills. The best institution to offer this service was no other than public libraries.

In addition to the above, institutions of higher learning, too, sprang up to provide education and training essential in the development of the new colonies. Most of these institutions had libraries which needed to be adequately staffed. The majority of the librarians manning these libraries were expatriates who were also required in the mother country. Their tenure could therefore not be guaranteed.

In an attempt to develop the colonies in an effort to ensure their sustainability, the governments endeavoured to set up departments and organizations to exploit the economic potential. As a result, research and other specialized organizations were established to realize these objectives. Most of these organizations set up libraries to provide the necessary back up. This development led to the proliferation of special libraries in the colonies that equally required trained library personnel.

In some colonies, the government established schools to provide primary and secondary education to the white residents. Most of the schools were modelled on the curricula prevailing in the mother country which emphasized, among others, well-resourced libraries. In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, a number of these schools were established. These schools like other organizations and institutions mentioned earlier, had to scramble for the limited supply of librarians emanating from the mother countries.

To promote reading culture, books had to be made available. Since books were fairly expensive to an ordinary person, libraries became necessary. As more libraries were established on the continent to provide information support, a need was expressed for trained librarians to run the services. Initially, the early libraries were manned by expatriate librarians educated in the West. However, with increased demand for librarians both in the colonies and mother countries, it became obvious that overseas training could not sustain this heavy demand. Something had to be done to train librarians locally.

The above situation was made worse with the departure of expatriate librarians immediately after independence. Many librarians left because the independent states could not continue supplementing their salaries. Others left because of the security situation in the host countries.

It was therefore felt that the only way to accelerate the development of libraries in Africa was to establish local training facilities. In addition, it was argued that overseas programmes did not meet the needs of African states because of the kind of environment the trainees went through. A local facility would address the manpower needs of African states compared to overseas programmes. It was argued that while some people will, and must, continue to be sent abroad for leadership training for some time to come, and some foreign librarians will, and must, continue to provide essential library leadership here, it is important that leadership-level training of professional librarians for Africa be provided in Africa.

In South Africa, LIS education programmes started as early as 1933. The South African Library Association (SALA) started a librarianship course on a correspondence basis modelled on the English system. The graduates of this programme were awarded an Associateship of the Library Association (ALA). In 1952, the course was taken over by the University of South Africa (UNISA) and formed part of UNISA's distance learning programmes. In 1938, the Department of Librarianship was started at the University of Pretoria. It initially offered a diploma programme in librarianship. In 1951, bachelor's and master's degrees were started in librarianship. In 1939, the University of Cape Town followed (Hood 1962). The need for LIS education programmes in South Africa emanated from university, college and public libraries.

In addition to the above institutions, other universities sprang up to offer librarianship education. Among these were Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and the University of Western Cape. Despite the big number of universities offering librarianship at this time, only a handful, including the University of South Africa, allowed black South Africans access to their programmes.

In East and West Africa, it was public more than any other types of libraries that pressurized governments to establish LIS education programmes in the 1960s. In East Africa, a number of public

libraries existed that expressed a demand for trained librarians. The East African Literature Bureau established in 1948 had established three libraries in the three capital cities in the region. The British Council, too, had libraries in the three cities. In addition, other institutions of higher learning existed in the region. These included Makerere University College, Royal Technical College, Egerton College and a handful of research institutions run by the then East Africa High Commission, a predecessor to the former East African Community. The need for a local training facility was also supported by a British library consultant in 1960 (Hockey 1960).

In West Africa, the British Council had established libraries in most of the British colonies. Nigeria, for instance, had two branches each in Ibadan and Enugu. Higher institutions of learning also existed in the region.

In Ethiopia, library education started in 1956 but became fully developed in 1960 (Pankhurst, 1989).The programme was based at the University of Addis Ababa. As in Anglophone countries, library education was started at diploma level. In 1988 a bachelor of arts degree was introduced to meet the growing needs for personnel with this qualification.

In 1990 a regional postgraduate programme was started at the University of Addis Ababa to complement the BA programme in library science. The programme Master of Science in Information Science was run by a new school, the School of Information Science for Africa (SISA). SISA was initially funded by Canada's IDRC. It was hoped that the Ethiopian authorities would take over the running of the programme after the IDRC exited. This did not, however, work out and when the initial funding ended, the programme, too, came to an end. During the few years it existed, the school provided training in information science for a number of people in the East African region.

The role of Unesco in the establishment of LIS education programmes
Unesco played a leading role in the establishment of LIS education programmes in Africa and in particular Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa. The pressure emanated from public libraries. Unesco was convinced that illiteracy in sub-Saharan Africa could only be eradicated with the support of libraries.

A number of regional seminars were held between 1953 and 1963 on the African continent to sensitize colonial governments on the need to establish public libraries in their colonies to speed up socio-economic development.

In an attempt to develop public libraries in Africa, a need was felt to establish library schools to provide adequate manpower to staff the libraries. As a result, library schools were established in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, Algeria and Egypt. Since it was not cost effective for each state to establish its own library school, Unesco recommended setting up regional schools to cater for the states in the region. In addition, it proposed that library schools be affiliated to universities. This was a departure from the practice in Britain where LIS education programmes were conducted outside university. It was felt the affiliation would improve the quality of the graduates. The result was the establishment of the following library schools to serve their respective regions:

a) Ghana Library School to serve the English-speaking countries of Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia.

b) East African School of Librarianship to serve Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar and Mauritius

c) Library School in Dakar in 1960 in Senegal to serve Francophone states of Senegal, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Gabon, etc.

d) Library School in Algiers to serve the Arab North.

South Africa was not considered, simply because it had ceased to be a member of Unesco in the 1950s and 1960s; and partly because it was self-sufficient in manpower training.

Establishment of Ghana Library School

Library training started at Achimota college in Ghana in 1945 with assistance from the British Council. The students studied for the Associateship of Library Association (ALA). This was considered an equivalent qualification to a university diploma offered by some universities at that time. It was a two-year programme. Being a regional programme, it catered for the needs of Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Following the move by Nigeria to start its own school at the University College in Ibadan, Ghana opened its own school in 1960 affiliated to the University College of Ghana.

Establishment of Library School at Ibadan, Nigeria

The postgraduate Diploma programme was started in 1960 with the assistance of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The applicants were required to hold an undergraduate degree from a university. Most students came from Nigeria and a few from other English-speaking states of Africa. The postgraduate programme was geared to meet the high level manpower needs of university and public libraries in the region. This school has since advanced to incorporate both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. A number of leading scholars in Nigeria have completed their programmes at Ibadan. It is considered by many Nigerians as the mother of LIS education in the country.

Establishment of the East African School of Librarianship (EASL)

Until 1963, practically all LIS education programmes were conducted overseas, mainly in Britain. The people who were privileged to pursue these programmes studied for the ALA qualification. Towards independence in the early 1960s, there were very few trained librarians in the region. However with more libraries coming up in the region, a need was felt for the establishment of a regional library school. In 1963 the East African School of Librarianship was established at the then Makerere University College, a constituent college of the University of East Africa (Saith 1973). The school was set up with the financial assistance of Unesco (Abidi 1980). It was charged with training library personnel for the entire East African region. The school started with two programmes: a certificate in librarianship course started in 1963 and lasted six months; and a diploma in librarianship course started in 1965 and lasted two years. During its early beginning, the diploma course was equated to the British ALA qualification. The graduates were considered information professionals and in some countries such as Kenya, the diploma holders were put on a par with university degree graduates. In 1977, the school instituted a postgraduate course lasting one year to cater for managerial positions in large libraries such as university and public libraries.

As the school had the mandate to train students from the three East African states, each state was allocated equal slots on the course. In 1971, when Idi Amin took over the reign in Uganda, his rule had a serious effect on the academic programmes. A number of academic staff and students left the country. The school was no exception. In 1976 Kenya withdrew all her students from Makerere. From that time on, EASL ceased to serve as a regional training ground for librarians.

Programmes offered in regional schools

The majority of the courses were modelled on the programmes prevailing in the mother country. In Anglophone Africa, the programmes offered were at non-degree level, essentially, the ALA qualification for people with either first degree or non-degree holders. Fellowship of the Library Association (FLA) was an advanced qualification. It was equated to a masters degree. Later, diploma programmes were introduced in universities.

In the US, LIS education was offered at degree level in universities. Those who trained in the United States did the programme at postgraduate level and obtained a masters degree in library science (MLS). The majority were employed in university libraries.

Most staff manning libraries in Anglophone Africa were trained in Britain.

Concept of regional library schools

Reasons for regional schools

a) Scarcity of students. There were few people working in libraries in need of these papers. Furthermore, the number of people taking up places in universities was too small. The few who went to universities opted for high profile courses such as law, medicine, agriculture and enginee*ring. No person wanted to be associated with shelving and stamping books, a perception associated with librarianship! Equally, there were fewer libraries to warrant self-sufficiency in this area.*

b) Inadequate lecturers to serve the schools. There was a serious shortage of staff to serve as lecturers in universities. The few that existed were expatriates. Even the mother countries could not guarantee a steady supply of qualified staff.

c) Need to maximize donor funding from organizations such as Unesco, Rockfeller, Ford, etc. Most of the library schools were established through funding coming from more than one source. Since donors were fewer, it was more appropriate to establish regional programmes to maximise donor funding. Donors, too, supported this approach.

d) Scarcity of funds. Few states had the financial ability to start their own schools. It was more appropriate to pool the resources to make the programme more cost effective. Even with the concept of regional schools, few states contributed to the programme. At the East African School of Librarianship, for instance, the partner states did not contribute a penny to the programme, leaving Makerere University to foot the cost of hosting the programme.

Failure of the concept

a) The need for self-sufficiency in manpower development. Some states did not like the idea of sharing resources. Nigeria, for instance, pulled out of the regional programme to start her own school at the University College in Ibadan. We believe she had the resources to go it alone.

b) Distance. Geographical or distance from the nearest regional institution, as was the case between Nigeria and Ghana, making it hard to access LIS education programmes. In West Africa, there was the case of distance. To access Ghana from Nigeria, one had to pass through two French-speaking countries.

c) Political instability and ideological differences characteristic of the 1970s. This period was characterized by many events. Among these is the Idi Amin rule in Uganda which greatly affected security in the country. Hundreds of lives were lost. Hundreds of people became refugees. In addition, the ideological differences make it hard for regional states to agree on joint projects. This was made worse by the Cold War characteristics of the 1970s.

d)Failure to accept changes. Failure to adapt to changes in the information profession, e.g. sticking to diploma programmes even when the situation has changed. For instance, it was not until 1989 that EASLIS started a degree programme, long after a similar programme had started at Moi University in Kenya. It is argued that had EASLIS started an undergraduate degree earlier, possibly in the late 1970s, the programme at Moi University would have taken a bit longer to start.

e) The high demand for library professionals in regional states, making it harder for regional schools to address them.

Present situation

Currently, library schools are mushrooming in many states. Nigeria has by far the largest number of library schools on the African continent, followed by South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. The rest of the states have at least one school each. Although Nigeria can boast the largest number, the quality of the programmes offered varies markedly from one school to another. Much of the curricula in these schools is not based on any serious market survey. South Africa has perhaps the best schools, a majority that have undergone serious quality checks where quality and not quantity is used to benchmark them.

In East Africa, Tanzania has the lowest number of LIS schools.

Establishment of LIS Schools in East Africa

LIS schools in Uganda
Uganda has established a number of LIS schools. Among these are the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS). EASLIS, formerly EASL, was established in 1963 with a certificate programme in librarianship lasting six months. Students were solicited from the entire East African region. A diploma programme lasting two academic years for holders of an advanced level school certificate or holders of a certificate course in librarianship was started in 1965. Unesco was instrumental in its establishment. During its early beginning, the school was run by the Council for Library Training in East Africa (CLTEA) in collaboration with Makerere University (Kigongo-Bukenya & Musoke 2011). CLTEA comprised heads of national public library networks and university libraries in East Africa. It acted as a policy formulation body for the school.

The problems at EASLIS
The school faced a number of problems during its early beginning. Among these were:
a) Financial provision for the school. The school relied heavily on external assistance. Regional states were reluctant to assist until Makerere took over the school in 1970.
b) Space was a major problem at the beginning until a new building was put up for them in 1971 with funding from the Swedish Government.
c) The security problem in Uganda from 1971 discouraged regional states from sending their students to the school.
d) Shortage of staff arising from the exodus of expatriate staff from 1972 seriously affected teaching at the school.

The weakness of the Makerere diploma programme
a) It lacked continuity. Although the diploma programme admitted people with minimum university entry qualifications, it was a terminal qualification. Graduates of the programme were unable to continue with higher education in LIS education unless they enrolled for another undergraduate degree. In Tanzania, Kaungamno (1979) cited a case where a staff member from TLS on scholarship in Australia had to re-do the programme to qualify for a BLS degree. In addition, instead of upgrading the diploma programme after a public outcry in East Africa, Makerere worsened the situation by introducing a postgraduate diploma programme to address the needs of university libraries.
b) It was considered a para-professional programme. Until the mid-1980s, the Makerere diploma was considered a professional qualification. Later, it was downgraded to a para-professional qualification. This development seriously affected its marketability in the region (Otike 1989). With the exception of Makerere University which employed its graduates as senior library assistants, other universities in the region did not employ them. Instead they opted to employ fresh graduates, send them overseas for postgraduate training and engage them as assistant librarians on completion. University librarians considered the Makerere diplomates as para-professionals, suitable to work in public and special libraries.
c) The conservative attitude of the school management. Despite the concern expressed by professionals in East Africa, the school did not introduce an undergraduate degree programme until 1989, long after other LIS schools in the region had been established. By the time an undergraduate bachelor of library and information studies (BLIS) was started, a number universities in the East African region had started LIS education programmes both at bachelors and postgraduate level with far superior programmes. Among these were the School of Information Sciences at Moi University, Department of Library Studies at the University of Zambia, Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of Botswana and Department of Library Science at the University of Addis Ababa. Since then, EASLIS has not been able to reclaim the regional market it commanded in the 1960s.

The school has since recovered from some of the problems mentioned and now has programmes ranging from undergraduate to doctorate programmes.

Since then, a number of LIS schools have been established in Uganda. Among these are:
a) Kyambogo University,
b) Uganda Christian University
c) Kampala International University.
d) Kabale University
e) Ndejje University

b) LIS Education in Kenya

Kenya has perhaps the highest number of LIS schools in the region. Among these are:
i) Moi University
ii) Egerton University
iii) Kisii University
iv) Laikipia University
vi) Kenyatta University
vii)Technical University of Kenya
Among private universities, Kenya hosts the following schools:
i) Catholic University of East Africa
ii) Kenya Methodist University
Among LIS schools in Kenya, the School of Information Sciences, Moi University at Eldoret has by far the most superior and established information-related programmes in East Africa. It has an academic establishment of over 40. Of this number, 15 are PhD holders. Its programmes range from BSc to a PhD degree in Information Sciences. These programmes are offered in the following specialised disciplines:
i) Department of Library and Information Studies
ii) Department of Records and Archives Management
iii) Department of Publishing and Media Studies
iv) Department of Information Technology
In addition to local students, the school receives a great number of students annually from many African countries, namely, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Sudan.

LIS education in Tanzania

Tanzania has the least LIS schools. Tanzania has tended to rely, to some extent, on LIS schools in her immediate neighbourhood to complement what she has. Among the schools are:
a) University of Dar-Es- Salaam. Dept. of Information Studies. The department carries both masters and doctorate programmes in LIS.
b) Tumaini University, Dar-Es-Salaam. This is a private university sponsored by the Lutheran Church. It is the only institution providing undergraduate programmes in the country.
c) Library School at Bagamoyo. This school is run by the Tanzania Library Service. It offers both certificate and diploma programmes in LIS. The programme is not accredited by any university in the country.

Effect of mushrooming of LIS education institutions

The proliferation of LIS schools has both positive and negative effects. It enables as many people as possible to access LIS education. People in distant areas are likely to be reached. The negative side is that if this trend is not checked, it can affect the quality of the graduates. This practice is prevalent in institutions where lecturers are advised to minimise on the number of failures as this is likely to discourage potential students.

Another effect is the branding of institutions by employers. With diminishing employment opportunities in the future, potential employers are likely to prefer products from institutions they feel meet their need. This development can lead to blacklisting of some institutions. If a graduate does not come from an institution of the employer's choice, then he cannot be employed (Otike 2007).

The quality of library services is likely to diminish and this could affect the ability of libraries to market themselves.

Change from Library to LIS schools

As stated elsewhere, library schools have had to review their programmes to include other related programmes such as archives and records management, information technology, publishing, knowledge management, etc. Among schools that have pioneered in this direction are Moi University School of Information Sciences, EASLIS, University of Pretoria, University of KwaZulu-Natal and University of Zululand. Some schools in South Africa have moved away from library science to the area of knowledge management (Ocholla & Bothma 2007).

Reasons

a) To keep abreast of changes taking place in the information field. Most schools offering LIS education used to be known as schools of librarianship, or simply, library schools. This name used to be very restrictive. The revision of the name to incorporate library and information studies or library and information science allows other disciplines to be brought on board such as archives and records management as in the case of Botswana. EASLIS at Makerere has brought on board the third discipline, publishing. Previously, it was known as the East African School of Librarianship.

b) To remain competitive. This has been brought about by the increasing number of schools. A number of LIS schools are coming up with more modern descriptions such as schools of information management, information science, department of knowledge management, etc. These descriptions appear to appeal to the youth. In Kenya, for instance, two new schools have come up with these names and are attracting a number of students: Schools of Information and Knowledge Management at Kisii University; and University of Kabianga.

c) Dislike for *librarian*. Many young librarians do not like the term. To them *librarian* is a term closely associated with shelving, stamping and issuing books. They argue that the kind of work they do does not justify this description. They are more comfortable with new terms such as information manager, information specialist, documentalist, knowledge manager, etc.

Current trends in LIS education

LIS programmes have become more sophisticated in line with market demand. The latest concepts have been incorporated in the LIS curricula. These include:

i) Information and Communication Technology. Libraries are seeking graduates who are IT compliant in line with the concept of libraries without walls. The paperless society is knocking at our door!

ii) Emphasis on multi-media. The print media is no longer the centre of attraction. Modern libraries require graduates who can handle all forms of media. In many schools, the curricula have been reviewed to address this challenge.

iii) Concept of knowledge management. LIS education now includes knowledge management. However, there is a need to investigate this issue to ascertain the present and future demand for graduates of knowledge management.

iv) Need for distance education in LIS. We must complement the effort of UNISA by incorporating the programme in LIS curricula. Kenyatta University in Kenya has ventured into distance learning. This development should be followed by other schools in an effort to take LIS education to remote areas of the continent.

Conclusion

The future of LIS education and by extension, LIS schools, will greatly depend on many factors:

a) Changes taking place in the information field. These will be influenced by new concepts and innovations.

b) Changes in technology. New technologies are occurring every day. LIS education curricula will need to adapt to these changes.

c) Support for the information profession. This will greatly depend on the perception of policy makers towards information and for that matter, the information or library profession. Policy makers have a great influence on the information profession. This will greatly depend on how they perceive information.

d) The attitude of the youth towards the library profession. How the youth will perceive the library profession. Do they love the library profession?

d) The future will also depend on how the library or information profession is marketed. The library profession can only be effectively marketed if librarians have interest in the library profession. In Africa the youth who happen to hold the future of the profession have no passion for the profession. For instance, many young librarians do not like to be referred to as librarians. They consider the term archaic. They would be more comfortable with terms such as documentalist, information scientist, information specialist, information manager and the like.

LIS schools of the future will need to adapt to changes taking place in the information industry in the West. The days of the printed book are virtually gone. Information now exists in many formats. The library profession will need to adapt to these changes to survive the stiff competition.

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