



Rebirth of library and information science education in Ethiopia: Retrospectives and prospectives

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Abstract This paper traces the history of Library and Information Science (LIS) education in Ethiopia, since its inception in 1959, reviewing both the retrospective (historical background) and prospective (rebirth and future direction). A comparison of the curricula of Jimma and Haramaya Universities demonstrates the transition from a traditional, closed model of librarianship to the contemporary, open model and the changes in programs' names from Library Science to Information Science. Internationalization of the programs, incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) related courses, and information literacy programs are enhancing the transformation of LIS education. The author recommends continued reorienting of programs to meet rapidly changing needs, expanding the academic as opposed to vocational only dimensions, and increased marketing.

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Background

History of LIS education in Ethiopia

Start up years

LIS education in Ethiopia has a half century history with long roots. The inception of LIS education in Ethiopia dates back to 1959 (Gupta, 1993) with a few short courses organized

by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and National Library of Ethiopia (Table 1). A diploma and a minor in Library Science program plan was set up and organized by the Ministry of Education and Arts by 1968/1969. Library education started in a very modest and slow way (Demissew, 2006). Some believe that LIS education had become one of the disciplines that was erroneously pushed to the corners for decades. Nevertheless, the launching of LIS education in Jimma University (in 2005/2006) and Haramaya University (in 2007/2008) heralded the rebirth of LIS education in Ethiopia.

The year 2002

It was quite clear that the year 2002 was the year in which many changes were made in LIS education. The Department

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of Library and Information Science was uprooted from its age-old home, Addis Ababa University (AAU) and replaced by the Department of Information System. Actually, the reason behind it was to “diversify the programs” and change it to “information management,” being under the Department of Information System (Mammo, 2007). Some educational programs die a natural death for many reasons. Unfortunately, for the Department of Library and Information Science, this author believes that this action was a result of an increased focus on technology and an undervaluing of the main tenets of theoretical frameworks of LIS. Many believe that it was a grave mistake, which negatively affected the profession and library and information services in Ethiopia.

A rebirth of LIS education in Ethiopia

It was only recently that Jimma University (in 2005/06) and Haramaya University (2007/08) launched LIS in their respective universities. These were heralded as a rebirth of LIS education in Ethiopia. Today, the LIS/IS department is there as equally as other departments in different Ethiopian universities.

The “rise and rise” of LIS/IS education

As of 2008, there were 60 LIS programs in Africa (Ocholla, 2008). In Ethiopia, currently there are two universities namely Jimma University and Haramaya University which have a Department of Information Science. In addition, two other universities, Gonder University and Mekelle University, are establishing LIS departments in their respective universities. What’s more, an MSc program is also being planned to begin within a year independently in both Haramaya University and Jimma University.

Data collection methods

For the purpose of this study, relevant data and information are gathered through a number of methods which include formal and informal discussions with students and staff, and curricula analysis. A review of relevant literatures was conducted and pertinent documents were consulted. Relevant lessons are drawn from the curriculum review conducted at a national level in Ethiopia in 2008/09.

The inclusion of information science into professional education programs and the adoption of the term “information science” into professional rhetoric indicate, among other conceptual changes, the growing emphasis on the role of technology, because technological change has transformed perceptions of and access to information (Cronin & Davenport, 1988; cited in Golub, 2009). Besides, an education in information science provides an excellent foundation for a career in libraries and information services (Arms, 2005). Hence, inter alia, in this article, Library and Information Science (LIS) and Information Science (IS) are used interchangeably as there are common elements that they share equally. In this regard, Saracevic (1999) identified three general characteristics of information science that are the leitmotif of its evolution and existence. These are shared with many fields (like library science/library and information science). First, information science is interdisciplinary in nature; however, the relations with various disciplines continue to change and the interdisciplinary evolution is far from over. Second, information science is inexorably connected to information technology. So is library and information science. Third, information science is, with many other fields, an active participant in the evolution of the information society. Above all, what

Table 1 Milestones.

Year	Major events
1959	Inception of formal LIS professional training (LIS education) in Ethiopia with the joint arrangement between Ministry of Education and the Fine Arts and National Library of Ethiopia (Gupta, 1993)
1969	Department of Library Science formally established and launched providing diploma program in library science under Faculty of Education, Addis Ababa University (Gupta, 1993)
1987	The curriculum for degree program in LIS was first developed and submitted to the Academic Standard and Curriculum Reviews (ASCR) AAU.
1988	The term “information” was developed from the title of the program LIS by the decision of ASCR, and decided to be renamed as “Degree of Library Science”
1989	The first degree program entitled “Degree of Library Science” launched.
1989–1990	Master of Information Science launched under the then School of Information Studies for Africa, now Faculty of Informatics.
1997	As a result of review of academic programs conducted in AAU, the nomenclature of the degree program changed from ‘Bachelor of Library Science’ to ‘Bachelor of Library and Information Science’. It was only a cosmetic name change, without a change to any course or its contents (Gojeh & Getachew, 2008; Mammo, 2007)
2002	Degree in Information System launched at AAU. Library and Information Science program was replaced by this new program unjustly. This was the decision that blights LIS education and libraries in Ethiopia.
2005–2006	Jimma University launched Bachelor of Library and Information Studies program under the Faculty of Natural and Information Science
2007	The nomenclature of LIS in Jimma University was changed to degree of “Information Studies”
2007–2008	Haramaya university launched degree program in Information Studies.
2008–2009	As a result of national curriculum review the name ‘Information Studies’ changed to ‘Information Science’

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