INFORMATION ETHICS IN THE CURRICULUM: PROSPECTS FOR INTEGRATION INTO THE BACHELOR OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (BLIS) PROGRAMME UNIVERSITY OF JOS[1]

By

Vicki Lawal PhD, CLN
Law Librarian
University of Jos Library
PMB 2084 Jos
ladila@gmail.com OR lawalv@unijos.edu.ng

Abstract
This paper presents a report on the status of the teaching of Information Ethics in the Bachelor of Library and Information Science programme at the University of Jos, Nigeria and highlights prospects for the integration of Information Ethics in the course curricula of the programme. Among other things, the paper recommends increased research by Library and Information Science professionals that support the integration of Information Ethics into the Bachelor of Library and Information Science curriculum in Nigerian universities and advocates for the development of a national policy on Information Ethics to provide guidance towards its implementation at the national level.

Keywords: Information Ethics, BLIS Curriculum, University of Jos

Introduction

The impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the rapid proliferation of information sources in various subject fields has underlined the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in ensuring that the curricula of learning is designed to provide a sound basis for the development of professional skills needed for the information age. In the past few years the field of librarianship has witnessed increasing transformation; among the many concerns of LIS professionals in this regard, is the need to improve the quality of student learning by re-designing the curricula of education to fit with global standards and best practices. Focus has also been directed to developing guidelines for strengthening professionalism through clearly defined ethical standards that would provide greater exposure to ethical practices among LIS professionals. This paper provides a brief outlook on the prospects of integrating Information Ethics (IE) as a course in the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) programme, University of Jos.

Definition of terms

Ethics basically refers to the principles of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group. In a profession, ethics relates to the principles and rules that guide the

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conduct of members to ensure that acceptable standards are maintained (Mabawonku, 2010). The code of ethics of any profession informs the public about the professional values of the group and provides ethical principles that guide the practitioners in their daily work (Diamond & Dragich, 2001). The term "Information Ethics" as defined by Britz"…is that field of study that investigates the ethical issues arising from the life cycle of information, including the generation, gathering, organisation, retrieval, distribution and use of information…" (2013, p. 3). Some of the terms closely associated with the concept of IE include access to information, accountability, conscience, information age, information integrity, information literacy, plagiarism, digital divide, intellectual property and so on (Le Sueur, Hommes & Bester, 2013).

Literature review

Information Ethics has become an area of global discourse as a result of the impact of ICT. Within the current decade, issues in IE have gained greater momentum particularly with respect to how the concept can be integrated into course programmes in HEIs (Todd Smith, 2009). In the field of LIS education, a number of scholarly researches have been conducted that explore the nature of IE, its importance and application to the curriculum. Ndandwe (2009) in his study on "Teaching and Learning of Information Ethics in Library and Information Science Departments/Schools in South Africa" noted that in most LIS departments in South Africa, IE is not taught as a major component of LIS education and training but rather as part of the content of other courses. The study identified some of the ethical dilemmas facing information professionals and recommends the inclusion of IE as a major component of LIS education and training in LIS schools in South Africa. He maintains however, that there is a need for uniformity in the course content of IE and greater collaboration between the LIS departments in South Africa for successful implementation to be achieved.

Mabawonku (2010) in her study on the challenges and prospects of the teaching of IE in LIS schools in Nigeria affirms the importance of IE within the curriculum and observes that the significance of an ethical code in the society is the role it plays in resolving the conflict of interest that may arise in the course of information provision. It is therefore necessary that LIS education is able to produce professionals that are well acquainted with the ethics of information provision in the 21ˢᵗ century so that they can effectively harmonize the interests of information providers with those of the users and the society.

From a much broader perspective, Ocholla's (2009) study explored IE education within LIS schools in Africa and sought to establish, among other things, the nature of the course content and teaching methods by which IE could be integrated into the curricula, the necessity of IE within the LIS curricula as well as the challenges and opportunities of IE education in Africa. The study provided the opinions of LIS experts across Africa; opinions expressed by various commentators in the study indicated that the increasing complexity of information use and application raises important questions on the role of IE in the curriculum of HEIs in Africa. From the findings of the study, there is a general consensus by the experts that IE should be offered by LIS departments in courses that account for the multi-disciplinary nature of the subject. The content of such a course should be objective and outcome-based and should be

made available to all students at all levels. Ocholla (2009) observed further that the importance of IE education within the LIS curriculum has the potential to support information professionals in their understanding and development of ethical values in the information society.

Recommendations from Hikwai's (2010) study on the teaching of information ethics in Zimbabwe also pointed for an urgent need to integrate information ethics in the current LIS curricula in ways that could address a variety of issues such as computer crime, copyright, privacy, software reliability, artificial intelligence, e-governance, e-commerce, in line with international trends and best practices.

From the foregoing, it is seen that considerable attention has been givento investigations on the development of a viable curriculum on IE in HEIs in Africa. This move is also helping to establish a link between LIS education and the profession thereby re-enforcing the importance of the information environment in supporting the integration of IE in the curriculum of institutions of higher learning.

University of Jos: Institutional context
The University of Jos was established in 1971 as a campus of University of Ibadan; it is a public university and one of about 140 universities in Nigeria. It is considered as one of the second generation universities, that is, those established between 1970 and 1985 to foster scientific and technological development in the country (Lawal & Akintunde, 2014). University of Jos has twelve faculties and a student population of over 22,873, while the School of Postgraduate Studies has 3, 511 students as at the 2014/2015 academic session (University of Jos Strategic Plan, 2015).

The Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) programme
The Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) programme at the University of Jos began in 2006 but only became fully operational in the 2012/2013 academic session with the first in-take of undergraduate students. The programme is established as a unit in the Department of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos. It currently has over 500 registered students for the academic session; the first graduating class are expected at the end of the 2015/2016 academic session.

The establishment of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) Honours degree programme became necessary due to the ever-changing context of the information society and the current challenges created by global trends in the processing and dissemination of information. Consequently, the programme was designed as a response to the dearth of LIS professionals with appropriate skills in the efficient use and application of information particularly in the North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria. The major aim of the BLIS programme is to prepare graduates with the professional competence needed for practice in the digital age. The BLIS degree programme, therefore, seeks to transcend the traditional practice of librarianship and prepare graduates to creatively adapt to the emerging nature of information, information gathering, processing, storage and effective dissemination of information. It is anticipated that the programme will produce graduates that can work in all levels of LIS education and other organisations.

The course curricula of the BLIS programme is designed in accordance with the National Universities Commission's (NUC) requirements for the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS). It covers mainly traditional courses in librarianship and describes the course content of what is studied in such areas as:

i.   History of Libraries
ii. Cataloguing and Classification
iii. Reference Sources and Services
iv. Indexing and Abstracting
v.   Records and Archives Management
vi. Collection development
vii. Library administration
viii. Desktop publishing

Currently there is no credit-bearing course offered on IE, however, a few of the courses offered in the third and fourth years of study suggest elements of IE. They include:

i.   Information and Communication Technology Education
ii. Introduction to Operating Systems
iii. Information Systems and Services
iv. Information Networking and Media Technology

In view of the current transformations brought about by ICT and the importance of IE, this situation suggests that the course curricula of the BLIS programme would need to be revised to include IE as one of its programme of instruction. Mabawonku (2010) in her detailed study on the challenges and prospects of the teaching of IE in LIS schools in Nigeria, noted that only Babcock University (as at 2010) has a full course outline reflecting the major aspects of IE as a discipline. Similarly, Olajide (2013) in his paper on a comparative analysis of undergraduate curricula of LIS schools in Nigeria observed that the curricula of most LIS schools in Nigeria are inadequate in terms of standard and quality in meeting the needs of the current information age. Findings from his comparative analysis also showed that the course "Ethics in Library and Information Work" is offered at Babcock University even though the status of the course is not indicated. In the light of the above analysis and based on the efforts towards narrowing the gap between LIS education and practice, it is evident that the current curriculum of the BLIS programme at the University of Jos will need to be revised to include IE as a course in order to reflect the response of the programme and the institution towards addressing the challenges of ICT and information use in Nigeria.

Problems and prospects of IE in the BLIS curriculum

The concept of IE has evolved over the past few years to include skills that are needed for the efficient and effective handling of the rising complexity of the information sources. The increasing impact of ICT in HEIs raises fundamental questions about current methods of teaching which in effect draws upon the professional strength of LIS professionals as the information specialists to teach students the ethical principles and values of information use. The establishment of a credit-bearing course in IE in the BLIS curriculum has the prospect of helping to instill the required ethical culture among our students particularly with respect to

issues of plagiarism, corruption, intellectual property, use of social media and also address the moral decadence that seem to characterize some of our institutions of higher learning. However, before this can be achieved, it is recommended that the following issues be addressed:

1.　Determine the course content of IE as a course: There is a need to address information ethics as an educational objective that can be systematically covered in the academic curricula by determining its outline, purpose, objectives and expected outcome as a course. Standards also need to be set that articulate the processes of an integrated approach to IE as a course programme within the LIS curriculum.

   a.　The importance of IE within the LIS curriculum will need to be recognised as a major goal of the University and other stakeholders in order to enhance its implementation. The obligation and responsibilities that accompany IE implementation requires all stakeholders in higher education, it is therefore necessary that an institution-wide policy which recognises the value of IE as a graduate requirement in LIS education is developed and sustained by the University.

   b.　Increased research in the area: From the literature review, it is seen that the dimensions of studies undertaken on IE have provided insights into the nature of LIS research being undertaken in HEIs in Africa which have generated interest among educational policy makers and practitioners on the subject. It is however important that LIS professionals provide reliable research data to support their recommendations for the integration of IE into the BLIS curriculum; more studies need to be conducted with greater emphasis on the curriculum development and teaching methods of IE.

2.　Inadequate human resources in terms of qualification to teach IE in the department also constitute a problem and must be addressed.There is the need to develop the skills of LIS educators/practitioners on IE so that they can stimulate and encourage its integration in the curriculum through advocacy.

3.　Need for a national policy on IE: There is need for assistance and co-operation by the government to provide guidance towards the implementation of IE at the national level. Practices have shown that recommendations are insufficient without governmental or institutional support and commitment to implementation by all stakeholders. Governmental and institutional support towards integrating IE in the curriculum is needed from all stakeholders.

4.　There is also the need to foster greater collaboration on issues of IE between LIS researchers across national and international boundaries in such areas as curriculum design, policy development, staff development and teaching methods.

Conclusion

The growing commitment by LIS educators to re-structure the learning process to reflect current technological challenges indicates a major shift in LIS education that will bring greater prospect for the integration of IE in HEIs in Africa. These efforts will also help in the formulation of ethical standards that will provide guidelines for future LIS professionals in

the workplace. For the University of Jos BLIS programme, current developments in the field of IE provide the Department an opportunity to evaluate the current structure of our curriculum with other institutions in Africa which will enable us make future recommendations for modifications to the BLIS programme. It is anticipated that such changes to the curricula will go a long way towards influencing policy and practice regarding the establishment of Information Ethics (IE) as a key aspect of LIS education in Nigeria.

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