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TITLE OF THESIS:

An Evaluation of Library and Information Science Curricula in Zimbabwe

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED: Master of Philosophy in Library and Information Science

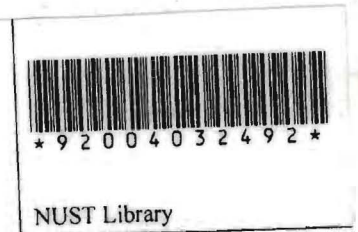
YEAR DEGREE GRANTED: 2012

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ABSTRACT

The triggers of this study were twofold: the criticism of library schools by employers for failing to keep pace with the demands of the industry and the mixed reactions expressed by students concerning their industrial attachment experience. Some students faced challenges in applying the skills and competencies they acquired from LIS schools to the world of work. The gap between what curricula offer and the skills needed by the employment market as indicated by employers and students in Zimbabwe was regarded as the problem. The aim of the study was therefore to assess the gap that exists between the required skills and curricula to discover how well the curricula covered the required skills. The study was done in two phases modelled on a sequential mixed methods approach. Phase I, which followed a deductive mode of enquiry based on the Double Helix Model, was largely quantitative and Phase II was qualitative. A survey of LIS employers, students and lecturers was carried out in Phase I. Sampling involved a modified multistage cluster design for selecting respondents from the employers' category. Both convenience and random sampling methods were used to select respondents from the student and lecturer categories. A SurveyMonkey tool integrated with Social Science Statistical Package (SPSS) was used to analyse the data from the questionnaires. Document analysis and comparative methods were the methods used in Phase II in deducing the similarities and differences between curricula offerings and employment needs.

Results showed that curricula were not covering the competencies required by employers properly. Only 32% of the competencies were properly covered. Another 32% of the competencies were not properly covered while 36% of the competencies and skills had not been covered at all. It was further shown that the curricula covered traditional and core skills of LIS such as cataloguing and classification, abstracting and indexing, and that there was little coverage of the generic and management skills which were in demand in the employment market. It was recommended that LIS schools in Zimbabwe should review and redesign the curricula in line with market requirements. Emphasis should be given to IT, management and information service that would give graduates a competitive edge in the labour market, by making them competent in the work place. University and polytechnic lecturers should not only be academics but should also be practising professionals so that they closely monitor developments in the field. It is recommended that library schools recruit lecturers who are also practising in industry. The Zimbabwe Library Association (ZIMLA) should accredit LIS courses taught in all schools to ensure that courses taught at different levels are of the right quality and ensure that education in Zimbabwe is standardised across library schools.

This study may be of value to the current and future directions of LIS education in Zimbabwe. The uncertain dynamics of the long-term needs of the employment market for graduates and of skills that graduates need to possess provided an imperative for ensuring that a major focus of library schools should enable graduates to develop skills essential to the industry.