

Towards a Southern African regional qualification framework: Enhancing quality through quality assurance in Higher and Tertiary LIS education programmes in Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

The world over, issues of quality control are the cornerstone of educational programmes and Zimbabwe is no exception. Zimbabwe's LIS qualifications are well sought after as evidenced by the number of LIS graduates who continue to secure employment opportunities throughout the region and beyond. This paper will explore the extent to which library and Information Science programmes can benefit from a SADC regional qualifications framework in the context of Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) and Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) models. The paper will examine the extent to which qualification frameworks can improve comparability of qualifications with respect to Library and information Science. It will also examine assessment models for TVET/CBET based models of LIS training in Zimbabwe and how these are contributing towards enhancing quality of LIS education and training. The paper will also examine the involvement of industry, communities, government and other key stakeholders in curriculum review and development with respect to Library and Information Science. It will also examine how Zimbabwe as a developing country is grappling with quality assurance issues with regards to the design, implementation and evaluation of LIS curriculum. The paper will also examine internal and external assessment mechanism and how they add value to education and training of LIS professionals. The paper will also examine how quality assurance can be enhanced through regional qualifications frameworks. The researcher's interest in this study has been stimulated by the drive to

establish a SADC qualifications framework and other development relating to the internationalization of LIS qualifications. The researchers will use a phenomenological approach to generate research findings and recommendations to assist policy makers. The researchers will make use of qualitative approach with reference to meanings and experiences relating to quality assurance issues in Higher and Tertiary education in Zimbabwe. The findings and recommendations of this research will be useful to policy makers, scholars and researchers.

Keywords: quality assurance; assessment and evaluation; public and private sector partnerships; qualifications frameworks.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the quality assurance in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) with specific reference to Zimbabwe. Quality assurance underpins the competitiveness of any educational programme. SADC is only one of the several regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa. It comprises 15 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa as follows: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Despite the abundance of natural and human resources, the SADC sub-region faces many challenges, the biggest among them being poverty, disease, and unemployment. The solution to these challenges rests on the educational systems, quality assurance, and development of qualifications frameworks to position the region on the global knowledge landscape. Higher Education should empower citizens to play a critical role towards the development of the region. Such a system with heavy emphasis on quality assurance should provide solution towards economic empowerment.

LIS education in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwean education sector is highly saturated with a myriad of professional fields ranging from the sciences, social sciences and the arts. Library and Information Science is one of the leading in the sustenance of the growing global knowledge economy. LIS education and training in Zimbabwe dates back to the eighties (80s) and has progressed to higher levels with the provision of Library and Information Science (LIS) courses at three (3) Polytechnics namely; Harare, Bulawayo and Gweru Polytechnics. The last decade of the twentieth century saw the profession rising to prominence with the inception of undergraduate and post graduate degree programmes at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and subsequently at the Zimbabwe Open University in 2010. NUST and ZOU programmes are monitored by ZIMCHE while courses in Polytechnics are under the jurisdiction of HEXCO.

Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) is a quality assurance agency established by an Act of Parliament, Chapter 25:27, in 2006 to register and accredit institutions of higher education. ZIMCHE promotes and coordinates education provided by institutions of higher education and to act as a regulator in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education.

There are also other institutions like Higher Examinations Council (HEXCO) and Standards Development and Research Unit (SDERU) responsible for examinations and standards. The accreditation of universities is done through ZIMCHE, while Polytechnics fall under Ministry of Higher education's Standards Development and Quality Assurance (SDQA). The

following institutions offer undergraduate, Degrees and post graduate courses in Library and Information Science as outlined below:

- National University of Science and Technology (NUST) (1991)
- Harare Polytechnic(1919)
- Bulawayo Polytechnic (1927)
- Gweru Polytechnic (1980+)

ZIMCHE establishes and uphold standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education. ZIMCHE undertakes its activities through council of reputable people appointed the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education on a three-year term. The council ensures that the functions of Council are executed in accordance to high standards of professionalism and in line with best practices (ZIMCHE Act, 2006). This is achieved through various mechanism including monitoring and evaluation. It processes applications for the establishment of private universities and public universities and establish common student admission procedures for institutions of higher education. Furthermore, it provides advises to the responsible Minister on the establishment, maintenance and expansion of universities and university colleges; the co-ordination of training at institutions of higher education; the standardisation, recognition and equation of Higher Education qualifications awarded by institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe and beyond. ZIMCHE accreditation system for registered universities in Zimbabwe is meant to encourage institutions to maintain standards above a certain minimum in their operations. ZIMCHE compels institutions to create internal quality assurance systems that will continuously monitor their adherence to the national accreditation criteria for all programmes. The criterion covers critical areas, for example, extent to which programmes meet or adhere to national requirements, student recruitment and selection and, admission, staffing and continuous professional skills development, teaching and learning strategies, student assessment and procedures, infrastructure, programme administration and coordination, rigour and security of assessment system and programme impact criterion among others.

Similarly, HEXCO has its own standards to enhance the quality of its products from Polytechnics. The quality of TVET products are a result of intensive quality assurance measures including extensive continuous internal and external assessment (Mazani, 2013). Quality assurance is undertaken through national and institutional policies and regulations, assessment and evaluation and monitoring mechanism. HEXCO has set minimum number of LIS assignments, practicals and tests that students should do during the course of training. Furthermore, no institution is allowed to register and offer LIS courses if, it does not adhere to expected standards, for example, conducive learning environment with access to internet, qualified staff, adequate time for tutorials and opportunities for educational visits among others. Furthermore other quality assurance measures include incognito inspections to assess learning environment and check on compliance to Higher Education standards with regards to recruitment and selection, quality and quantity of work and learning environment.

SADC's vision is one of a common future, within a regional community that will ensure economic well-being, improvement of the standards of living and quality of life, freedom and social justice; peace and security for the peoples of Southern Africa. This shared vision is anchored on the common values and principles and the historical and cultural affinities that exist amongst the peoples of Southern Africa. SADC's programs are guided by the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), and at the centre of this common agenda and strategy is poverty alleviation through the promotion of "sustainable and equitable economic

growth and socio-economic development". SADC recognized the importance of human resource development in the achievement of its regional integration agenda. To this end, education and skills development is a crucial component of the SADC Programme of Action. The SADC Education and Skills Development Programme are guided by the Protocol on Education and Training and the Second Decade of Education for Africa Plan of Action (2006-2015) which prioritizes TVET as a critical engine for socio-economic development.

Literature review

Chikonzo, et.al, (2014) acknowledges the changing nature of LIS training and the need for continuous learning to adjust to change. Chikonzo et al (2014) reported that technological developments, new user needs and expectations, electronic publishing and library automation were the major drivers behind the changes in Librarianship landscape in Zimbabwe. They however cited that most librarians were attributing their lack of skills from the training that they have received from colleges be it at Diploma, Degree or masters level. In their findings all the groups revealed that the curriculum was inadequate, though relevant to some extent. The major reason for the inadequacy was the gap between taught courses and industrial practice. It was also noted that the courses were more theoretical than practical thereby making them irreconcilable with practice. To this effect, the respondents pointed out that there was a mismatch between teaching approaches and course content and the requirements of industry.

It has emerged that while the LIS curricula are believed to give information professionals a sound basis to be able to work; many of them believe that the curricula are inadequate for them to be able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as expected. As a result, many courses have been suggested to be added to the LIS curricula by the information professionals who were interviewed. It implies that those who are involved in the development of LIS curricula should look beyond the conventional and seek ways of integrating aspects from other disciplines in order for them to produce professionals who are adequately prepared to deliver in their work environments.

There was therefore a call for a change in the curricula in the training of Librarians in Zimbabwe which augurs well with the SADC mandate of TVET based education and international standards. Curriculum review and development is an ongoing process because of the ever-changing socio-economic and technological environment. Quality assurance is central to curriculum review and development.

Ocholla, (2008) states that initial LIS schools in Africa focused on the education and training of librarians for work in libraries, while the focus of current LIS schools in the region has grown more diverse as libraries alone are unable to provide enough job opportunities for LIS graduates. Ocholla (2008) suggests that libraries are also facing stiff competition from emerging information provision centres and services, particularly technology-driven services such as the internet and wireless technology, whose proximity to information seekers and relevance of content is increasingly rendering library services irrelevant to most people. These developments are happening to an old information service provision centre (library) that has not created a niche area for itself in the deprived community that has always marginalized the majority of the population in Africa because of its elitism, urban-centrism and Euro-centrism as noted in studies (e.g. Issak, 2000; Sturges and Neill, 1990) arguing that libraries in Africa are largely stocked with western literature that are written in non-African languages. The library's collection rarely address Africa's context or readers information needs and they are few and located far away from those who could benefit from their

services. Quality is defined from the perspective of the users of library services and those who will employ LIS graduates and this justifies calls for a paradigm –shift towards user –centric programmes. However, such issues have for long been overlooked because of the obsession to acquire qualifications.

The 19th century brought with it a wave of liberalism and consciousness of equal rights and opportunities, accompanied by increased urbanisation and bureaucratisation. The increased need for skilled manpower eventually resulted in an emphasis on credentials that persists to the present day. The LIS profession is not immune to credentials and meritocracy but rather is the quality of education and training that is of importance. The credential society even though sometimes synonymous with utilitarianism has become the key feature of developed economies (Giddens, 2006). During the 20th century the emphasis shifted to human capital theory and technological development, eventually leading to concerns about whether the education system was able to meet the demands of the labour market. This stimulated the need to ensure that quality assurance measures were strengthened in Higher Education. The twenty first century ushered in a “*wired, webbed and windowed*” world whereby socio-economic knowledge and skills are critical factors for socio–economic progress (Trilling and Hood, 1999, 19). However such skills should be buttressed on sound quality assurance systems. This is why it is important to explore quality assurance strategies because the future of LIS education and training and any other programme will be judged on the basis of its quality. TVETISED LIS programmes in Zimbabwe are supported through collaboration between industry and the academic in all aspects of training from curriculum development and internal and external assessment. Experts from various types of libraries are invited to participate external assessment of LIS programmes. They will spend a week assessing students’ academic files and then they will prepare a report which they will present before an academic board for adoption. The final report will still undergo pre-ratification and ratification before results are made public.

CBET is premised on the notion that all qualifications could (and should) be expressed in terms of outcomes without prescribing a learning pathway or programme (Young, 2005, p. 5) Competency based education and training (CBET) is now used as an important strategy in most TVET institutions. It does not only promote the quality of the programmes but ensures their sustainability in a modern dynamically complex learning and working environment (Woyo, 2013). CBET curriculum is meant to bridge the lacunae between what is taught at college and the real world of work. Mutarubukwa (2007) views CBET as a special vehicle to develop a work force that can underpin a growing economy. It is a trainee centred program that overcomes the ‘*Cartesian*’ problem of the dichotomy between the mind and body because it enables learners to integrate classroom theory into practice in the workshop/ laboratory or On Job Training Education and Training (OJET) (Saton and Tse, 2000). LIS students go on industrial attachment for a complete year.

Young (2005) state that, national qualifications framework is deeply rooted in the competence approach to vocational education. A very positive development observed is that qualification frameworks have been established across the region with the major objective of enhancing coherence and articulation of TVET qualifications. Qualifications frameworks also enhance quality because they are based on benchmarking. However, as several of the frameworks are in early phases of development, and as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are not yet widespread, the information available in the national monitoring reports does not provide any strong indication of best practices in qualification framework

development and implementation that demonstrably leads to the achievement of this policy goal.

Article 6 of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training provides for cooperation among member states in the area of “Vocational Education and Technical Training”, covering areas of curriculum, training materials, and examinations and accreditation. Such collaboration is meant to take the form of an exchange of knowledge and experiences and the implementation of joint programs with a view to achieving the harmonization of regional TVET systems in the long term. The protocol also provides for the establishment, in the long term, of centres of Specialization for TVET in order to facilitate the achievement of these objectives. Continuous and productive cooperation among member states will contribute towards the realization of NQFs/RQFs. It is important to note that NQF/RQF’s cannot be realized without quality assurance measures as will be highlighted in the next paragraph. Quality assurance and Qualifications frameworks can be integrated to produce quality products

Regional Qualifications frameworks are underpinned by two critical factors namely; mobility and quality assurance. There is a growing demand to increase the competencies of individuals in line with socio-economic development in most developing countries. Dewah *et.al* (2005) states that the rationalisation of TVET resulted in a comprehensive policy document that has guide the development of TVET in Zimbabwe up to the moment. The development and success of TVET is underpinned by National Qualifications frameworks with regards to standards and quality assurance. The authors further state that the “Rationalisation of Technical and Vocational Education in Zimbabwe” (1990) structured technical and vocational education various levels at ranging from PVC, NFC, NC, ND and HND. The Bachelor of Technology (B-Tech) was added as a sixth level with the hope to progress to Masters of Technology (M-Tech). Zimbabwe’s LIS TVET course is offered up to HIGHER National Diploma which ranked eight(8) on the South African Qualifications Authority(SAQA) National Qualifications frameworks(NQF).

Currently it appears there is no coordination between TVET and academic institutions because of lack of policy to guide movement and transfer of credits (Dewah, *et.al*, 2005). Polytechnic and university graduates will benefit immensely from the development of a National and Regional Qualifications Framework that will facilitate rationalisation, standards and mobility at National and Regional levels.

Babyegewa (2006) states that quality assurance entails the use of different strategies to maintain high standards of service provided and improve products and services. Furthermore, the author states that quality assurance refers to the systems through which an institution demonstrates that the programmes provided are of good quality and that there are mechanism in place to ensure that learners will perform to desire standards. In Higher, education quality assurance permeates all the learning and teaching activities, for example, recruitment, enrolment, staff promotion, internal and external assessment and academic audits among others. Majumdar *et. al*, (2010) describes quality assurance in TVET as the systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by an educational institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved quality. African Union (2007) stated that quality is a multidimensional concept, embracing all functions and activities of education system, including teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community, academic environment; taking into account national cultural

values and circumstances and international dimensions such as exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects.

National and Regional qualifications frameworks are now a common feature of the educational systems of progressive nations. Such developments are critical for LIS students who will want to transfer credits or work beyond their borders. Such frameworks are needed to blur the boundaries between LIS education in Polytechnics and Universities. The silo mode of operation that characterises the two systems of learning cannot be sustained considering the immense benefits that can be accrued from the complementarities of the two (Higgs and van Wyke, 2007).

There is growing interest in Quality Assurance and Internationalization of LIS programmes the world over. In IFLA the drive towards internationalisation has also gathered momentum under IFLA's Education and Training Section. The section has been exploring the challenges of international reciprocity/ equivalence and opportunities for LIS Students with regards to increasing mobility and employability beyond national boundaries (Tammaro, 2006). IFLA has developed frameworks of principles, standards and procedures to assure transparency stimulate cooperation between LIS schools and foster international cooperation to enhance quality assurance of LIS programmes.

In the context of African librarianship, it is imperative to develop qualifications frameworks that recognise African ethos, experiences, aspirations, humanness and quality assurance. An eclectic model of curriculum review which takes into account current topical issues and local needs has helped to produce quality curriculum. IFLA standards and other subjects relating to bibliographic standards have become the yardsticks to determine relevancy or up to datedness of LIS programmes in Zimbabwe. The incorporation of oral traditions, intergenerational dialogue, story-telling, indigenous knowledge, African aesthetics and other socio-cultural topics in the LIS curriculum should be commended as a step in the right direction in bringing relevance to the oral shaped information needs of Southern Africa.

Research Methodology

The researcher made use of the phenomenological approach which considers mindsets of research participants even though it maintains an adequately objective analysis of the process. The researcher viewed this approach as a priori investigation of meanings that are common to different minds. There are a variety of philosophical thoughts and their ultimate application in Library and Information Science will help to leverage the profession and improve practice. Budd (2004) is of the view that approaching Library and Information Science from various philosophical dimensions will provide objective answers or solutions to problems inherent in any progressive discipline. Furthermore the author argues that the application of phenomenology in Library and Information Science provides an epistemological basis to unravel critical questions of intellectual and practical interest to Library phenomenology. The researchers are involved in LIS as practitioners and practitioners. They used their experience in participating in Higher and Tertiary as a basis to strengthen their argument on quality assurance.

Data collection instruments

The researchers used interviews as data collection instruments. The instruments were designed and pilot tested to ensure that they would be able generate valid and reliable data. Researchers used non-probability sample. Lecturers (6) from were interviewed. These lecturers were chosen from three TVET institutions in the three provinces of Zimbabwe

namely Harare, Matabeleland and Midlands. The lecturers were chosen because they are actively involved in quality assurance. They are the custodians of quality assurance. They are involved in curriculum review and development, compilation, proof –reading, marking and administration of examinations on job placement for LIS students. The researchers used qualitative approach to understudy the quality assurance with regards to recruitment and enrolment, teaching, internal and external assessment, marking and verification of examinations, and ratification. The researchers are actively involved in TVET and they used this as basis to undertake the study.

Responses to the interview schedule

- Quality assurance has been a cause of major concern at the Polytechnics and Universities alike. Quality assurance is undertaken through continuous internal and external assessment, curriculum review and development and monitoring and evaluation
- Lecturers revealed that they employed a variety of quality assurance measures for LIS programmes, for example, quality assurance during recruitment and selection to ensure that students with prerequisite qualifications are enrolled, interviewing prospective candidates, use of high quality instructional material, access to online bibliographic and full text databases, highly qualified staff, affording students ample time to interact with content and lecturers, timeous feedback on assignments, practical exercises, continuous updating of learning resources, discovery learning, learner centred methodologies, formative and summative evaluation, continuous review of curriculum. The lecturers stated that each TVET department has a selection committee which uses a HEXCO recruitment procedure to ensure that recruitment is conducted in line with HEXCO policy and regulations.
- Curriculum standards in the Library and Information Science Discipline and others are set and developed assuring quality Technical and Vocational Education and training by rendering relevant and responsive curricula, continuous assessment and examinations for sustainable development. Wide consultations from professional bodies are made through HEXCO namely NAMACO (Industry and Commerce) Professional Associations like ZIMLA, government departments and Parastatals to ensure qualitative LIS curriculum development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- TVET institutions are bound by HEXCO guidelines policies and procedures, for example, LIS schools are bound by policies with regards to recruitment, teaching and learning conditions, internal and external assessment, marking of examinations, verification and ratification of results.
- Formative and summative assessments which are a common feature of LIS programmes in Zimbabwe's TVET institutions serve as quality assurance measures which are meant to add value to the education and training and credibility of the qualifications in Zimbabwe and beyond.
- The involvement of industry, communities and government has helped to develop quality demand driven LIS courses and graduates. The researchers found out that the collaboration between industry, government and Higher education covers a variety of aspects contributing towards quality assurance, for example, On Job Education and Training (OJET), curriculum review and development, research, and continuous assessment (formative and summative assessment). This development is in sync with the new mode of knowledge production through inter-institutional collaboration.

- The design, implementation and evaluation of LIS programmes in TVET institutions in Zimbabwe are premised on the knowledge triad comprising government, industry, and higher education. The researchers found out that this collaboration transcends curriculum issues to include research and infrastructural development through Public Private Sector Partnerships (PPPs) to improve quality of education and training.
- Collaboration between various stakeholders has helped to develop a Competency Based Education and Training curriculum (CBETISED) for the LIS discipline. Industry together with lecturers developed LIS performance outcomes and competencies critical at each level of training. The CBET model places emphasis on competencies and students are expected to master such competencies if they are going to pass.
- Compulsory On the job placement for LIS lecturers is a quality assurance measure that exposes lecturers to latest technology through continuous professional development (CPD).
- Plans are afoot to promulgate ZIMEQA to ensure consolidated qualitative regulation, monitoring and evaluation of the training in all sectors of technical and vocational training in Zimbabwe through the CBETISATION and TVETISATION processes;
- In Zimbabwe, Library and Information Science (LIS) encounter problems when they want to transfer credits from TVET institutions to academic institutions. Currently in Zimbabwe, the highest LIS award in TVET is a Higher National Diploma (HND) and when one wants to crossover or transfer credits to academic institutions it becomes a challenge. This anomaly is a result of lack of coordination between the two systems resulting in individual departments in universities having the discretion to place transfers at any level they deem fit. It is through the establishment of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) that mobility can be facilitated.

Conclusion

Quality assurance should be central to all aspects of education, and training of LIS graduates. It is hoped that the LIS profession will immensely benefit from enhanced quality assurance measures to ensure that graduates acquire the prerequisite knowledge and skills critical for work in the knowledge and technology driven twenty-first century. This will contribute towards improved quality of LIS programmes. Country specific frameworks should also be realised so that there is flow of information towards regional integration to achieve the SADC vision of quality education. Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks aim to achieve common objectives with reference to openness, reliability and relevance of LIS education. Quality assurance requires cooperation between various stakeholders to ensure that quality of LIS education will enable graduates to secure and create employment as well as recognition beyond national boundaries.

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