

Suitability of the current Kenyan LIS curriculum for the digital age

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession has continued to evolve both in theory and practice. Now, the “custodian librarian” has grown into a “knowledge manager” and a “digital librarian.” Therefore, there has been an increasing need to revamp the LIS curriculum to respond to the changing roles of the LIS professions. This study aimed to assess the suitability of the current Kenyan LIS curriculum for the digital age. In carrying out the investigation, a descriptive survey design was used. The study sample population included 7 heads of LIS departments from 7 of the oldest universities offering LIS degrees and 58 university librarians. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Varying responses were given by respondents concerning satisfaction with the current LIS curriculum, its alignment with emerging technologies in the LIS field, and how prepared the LIS graduates were for the roles of librarianship. The responses revealed a skill mismatch, and therefore respondents suggested the inclusion of more ICT-related courses in the LIS curriculum. It was further reported that the LIS curriculum does not sufficiently address current job market requirements. Curriculum review and changing the learning objectives to take into account new emerging trends that translate into best practices are paramount. The study therefore recommended collaborative reviewing of the LIS curriculum, standardization, and harmonizing the LIS curriculum across institutions to ensure students graduate with similar competencies. This, therefore, calls for LIS educators to assess the LIS curriculum to ensure it is aligned to current market needs.

(Key words: curriculum; library and information science; information landscape; digital librarian; information and communication technology)

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology is having a transformative effect on the fields of library and information science (LIS). Ekoja et al. (2022) claim that the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), the digital revolution, and the information flood characterize the modern LIS area. The rapid advancements in technology have led to the current perception of LIS education as an interdisciplinary field. For instance, LIS education curricula include knowledge management, information architecture, computer science, information systems, data science, research data management, and digitization, to mention a few (Abubakar, 2021; Assefa, S & Wang, P., 2018; Wang et al., 2013). Furthermore, faculty members with a range of expertise have been appointed to instruct and equip LIS graduates with contemporary skills and competencies that are aligned with prevailing market trends in the LIS field (Abubakar, 2021).

Rethinking the LIS curriculum is essential to address the aforementioned developments and satisfy the demands of the technology-driven, new information age. However, the way industrialized and developing nations are reacting to the changes in LIS education is very different. Kassim et al. (2023) claim that the University of Dar es Salaam's LIS master's curriculum did not fully fulfil all the expectations and needs of the graduates, employers, and society, recommending a LIS curriculum review. Similar findings have been documented across various countries, revealing a disconnect between the skills imparted in LIS programs and those demanded by the labor market (Katuli-Munyoro & Mutula, 2019). In parallel, challenges encountered in LIS education in China and the United States have been identified in areas such as curriculum update and enhancement, identity and accreditation, institutional survival and growth, course delivery formats, and content (Xue et al., 2019).

According to a study done by Ariole et al. (2017) the LIS curriculum needs to be reorganized and reviewed, digital library courses need to be added, and practical laboratories and learning materials need to be well-equipped and operational in order to produce graduates who are ready to work efficiently in the digital world. According to research done in Kenya, librarians lack ICT proficiency, and LIS programs don't include enough ICT courses to equip graduates with the skills they need to function in a digital workplace (Agava & Underwood, 2020; Rotich, 2021). This emphasizes the need to determine whether the Kenyan LIS curriculum is appropriate for the digital age by analysing how well it aligns with new ICT trends, how prepared current LIS graduates are for the digital age, and possible ways to improve the LIS curriculum.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of library and information science as a faculty or school department dates back to the 1980s. The LIS departments that belonged to the faculty of social sciences or humanities were referred to as librarianship, library science/library studies, or department of library science (Ocholla & Bothma, 2007). But in the 1990s, a change took place, as many LIS departments chose to change their names to Information Science or Information Studies departments (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007). For example, during the "OpenUP March 2007" event at the University of Namibia, the LIS program was renamed the Department of Information and Communication Studies. The program at the University of Johannesburg was also renamed the Department of Information and Knowledge Management. This renaming reflects a broader global trend that is also evident among institutions listed in the United States Information Science (iSchool) directory (Weech, 2019).

Some universities have relocated their LIS departments to the information technology and pure science schools in order to better reflect on the most recent advancements in the field. For instance, the LIS department is housed in the School of Information Technology at the University of Pretoria (Ocholla & Bothma, 2007). The LIS department at Kenyatta University was transferred from the School of Education and Lifelong Learning to the School of Pure and Applied Sciences in 2023. The department's name has been changed from Library and Information Science to Computing and Information Science by the university. According to Salawu and Igwe (2018), these shifts result from the realization that the LIS program is interdisciplinary, reflecting the variety, depth, and breadth of occupations that call for LIS expertise.

A survey by Yadav (2022) in India looked at how well library and information science (LIS) schools were preparing graduates for the digital world. The findings showed that these schools did not offer a separate course module just for digital libraries; instead, the content was part of the larger Information and Communication Technology (ICT) curriculum. The survey also showed that LIS schools were not consistent in how they divided up topics and credits between courses. The skills taught by Indian LIS schools didn't match up with the skills needed in the job market. The study therefore suggested that LIS schools should allocate more credits to the advanced course, introduce new courses, and update the curricula to meet the current and future job market. New courses like 'Research Data Management' and 'Data and Visual Literacy' should be introduced, especially at the postgraduate level.

There have been a number of studies in Kenya about the Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum. Gathegi and Mwathi (2007) concentrated on the Department of Library Studies at Kenyatta University, which they indicated was reassessing its curriculum to align with the demands of a 21st-century global networked society and to fulfil the information needs of the nation. The authors stated that the process did not have any benchmarks, like the suggested competencies from the American Library Association that show the knowledge, skills, and experience that information professionals should have. The Kenya Library Association did not have the same skills as other groups, which could be a chance for East African groups to work together. They suggested that all courses that are offered in a lot of different degree programs use the same numbering system.

A study by Rukwaro and Bii (2016) called "LIS Education and Training in Kenya: Emergence, Evolution, Challenges, and Opportunities" found that there are many problems with library and information science (LIS) education in Kenya. These problems include not having enough teachers, not having enough teaching materials and infrastructure, LIS programs that don't meet the needs of the job market, and curricula that don't match the needs of the job market, among others (Rukwaro & Bii, 2016). Their suggestions were based on research done by Kavulya (2007). The study suggested that LIS students should learn skills and competencies and be ready for the job market through practical work, internships, and volunteering. A robust professional association that could protect and advance the interests of its members and maintain quality control was also suggested by the study. To meet their ICT-related needs in the evolving job market, Agava and Underwood (2020) echoed their

recommendation that professional associations like the Kenya Library Association (KLA) should regularly conduct ICT-related training for library professions. The study also suggested that more useful ICT-related courses and internships be offered so that graduates can gain marketable skills.

The study used Wheeler's Cyclical Model as its theoretical foundation to assess the appropriateness of Library and Information Science (LIS) curricula. A dynamic approach to ensuring LIS curricula align with professional and societal needs is provided by Wheeler's model, which was proposed in 1967 by educator Wheeler and consists of five iterative phases: aims, goals, and objectives; selection and organization of learning experiences; evaluation; and feedback and revision. The framework emphasizes relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and adaptability in order to define suitability as the curriculum's capacity to prepare graduates for changing LIS roles. The goals ought to strike a balance between theoretical and practical abilities, like data curation and metadata standards. Trends like digital libraries must be reflected in learning activities, such as practical projects using library software. By using modular structures, content organization guarantees progressive skill development. Employer surveys and other evaluation techniques are used to measure results, and feedback is used to inform changes that close gaps in knowledge, like cybersecurity. The framework is predicated on the dynamic nature of the LIS field and the requirement for stakeholder input. It draws attention to ramifications like flexible design and technology integration. By using Wheeler's model, LIS programs can adapt to changing professional needs and technological breakthroughs, preparing graduates for a variety of information society roles through stakeholder collaboration and ongoing improvement.

III. METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured questionnaires were used in this study's descriptive survey research design to collect data from university librarians and heads of LIS departments. Librarians from 58 institutions registered with the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) participated in the study, which concentrated on 26

universities that provide instruction in library and information science.

Seven universities; Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Egerton University, Moi University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology, Maseno University, and Masinde Muliro University, known for their ground-breaking contributions to LIS education in Kenya were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. These seven universities' LIS department heads were polled.

While university librarians' questionnaires focused on the abilities and competencies of recently hired LIS professionals, LIS department heads' questionnaires addressed curriculum-related concerns. Small samples of respondents were used to pre-test the questionnaires, and any necessary adjustments were made to increase their validity. To test their reliability, the same subjects were given the instruments twice, separated by two weeks. The reliability coefficient was 0.91. Excel was used for independent analysis and discussion of the data gathered from the two sets of questionnaires. The results were presented using tables, graphs, and narration. 52.3% of the questionnaires, which were completed by university librarians and heads of LIS departments, respectively, were returned.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The questionnaire focused on the number of years working as the head of the LIS department and as a university librarian to establish the characteristics of the workforce in the LIS field. The study found that 3 (50%) of heads of LIS departments worked 1-5 years, 2 (33.3%) had over ten years' experience, and 1 (16.7%) had between 6 to 10 years of experience, as shown in Figure 1. Twenty (71%) of the university librarians have worked as university librarians for over 10 years, 5 (18%) had worked between 6 and 9 years, while the remaining 3 (11%) had between 1 and 5 years of experience, as shown in Figure 2. All university librarians reported having worked with recent LIS graduates.

Figure 1: Years of working as Heads of Department

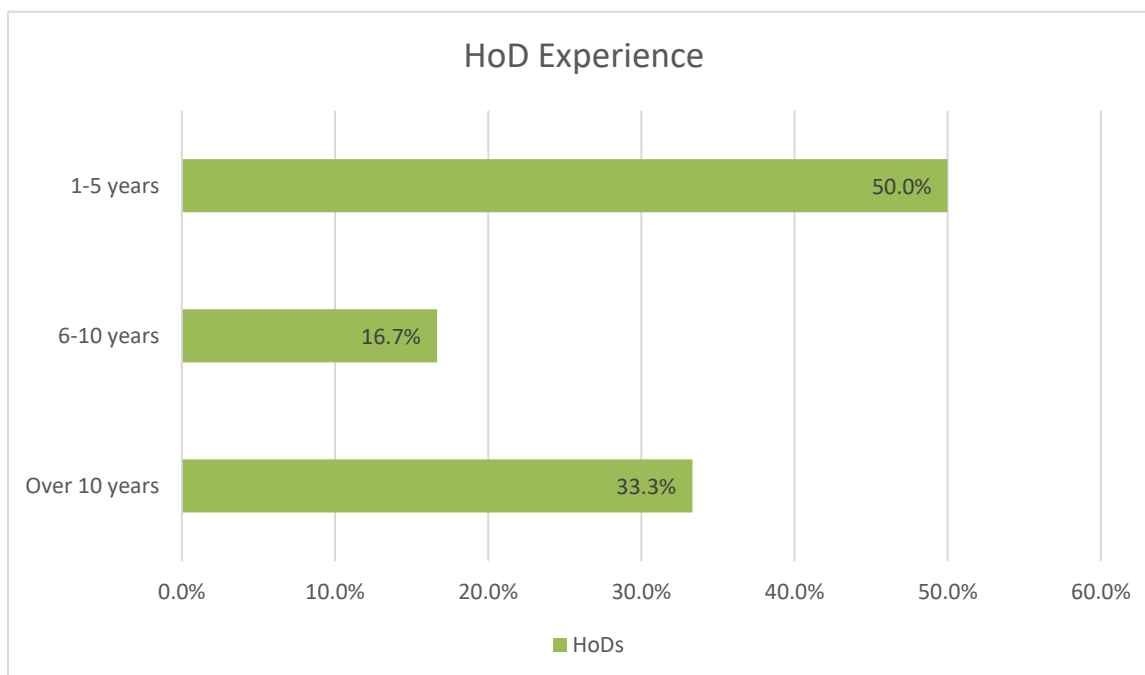


Figure 2: Years of working as a University Librarian

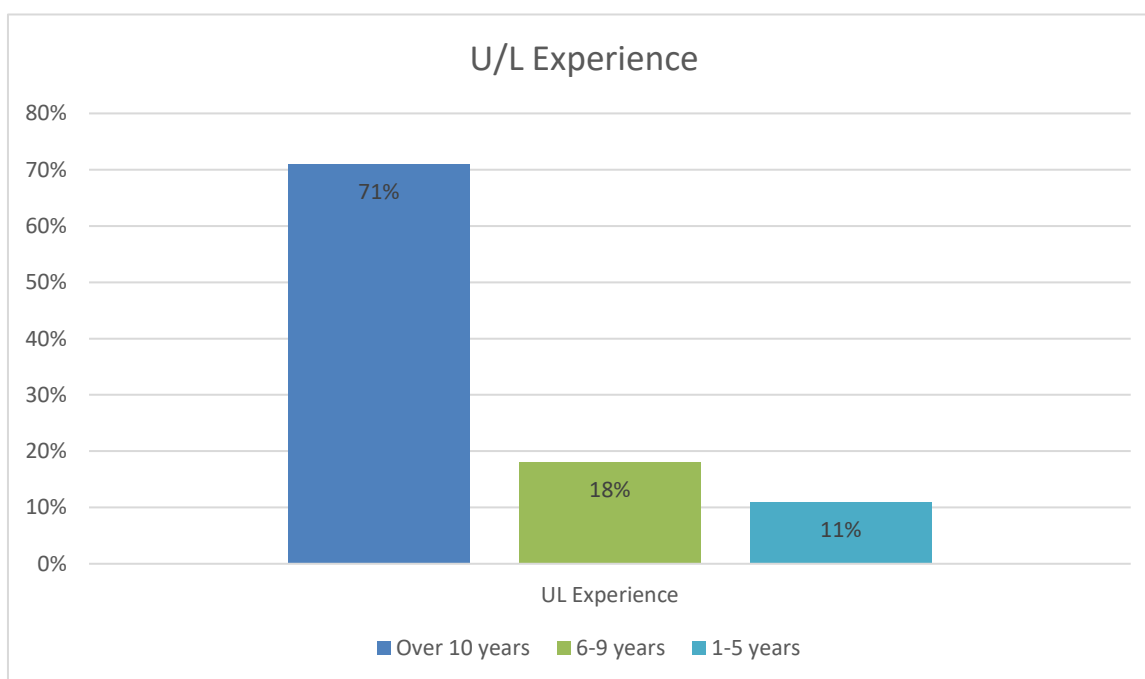


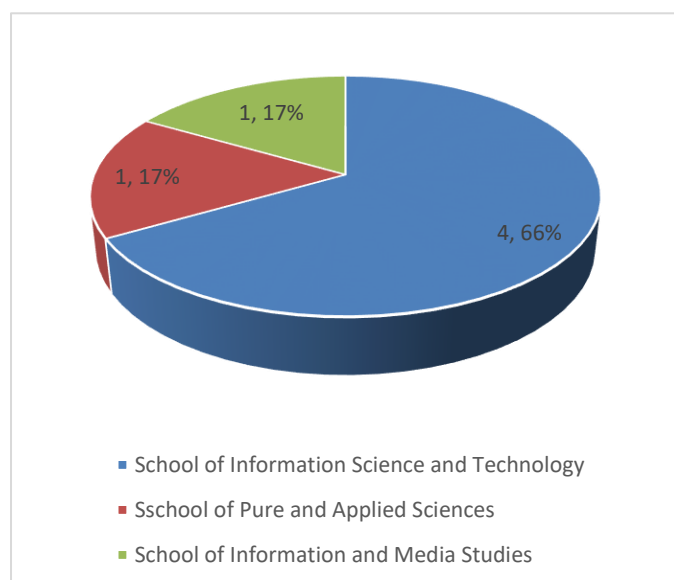
Table 1 indicated that 67 (63.8%) respondents were male while 38 (36.2%) were female. This showed that the male respondents are higher than the female respondents in the university library as it is evident that the male population outnumbered the females in the public tertiary institutions in Katsina state since everyone has an equal chance of being employed to work in the sector. Based on the findings, the researchers believed that the males outnumbered the females perhaps due to the nature of the job (working with skills and dedication), cultural, and religious factors among others.

Alignment of LIS Curriculum with emerging trends in the LIS Profession

A. LIS Departments

The study sought to find out the naming of the LIS department/school across the institutions under investigation so as to determine whether there is any uniformity. This would lay a foundation on the various disparities in the LIS education across different institutions. Figure 3 illustrates the naming of LIS departments in various institutions.

Figure 3: Schools housing LIS Departments



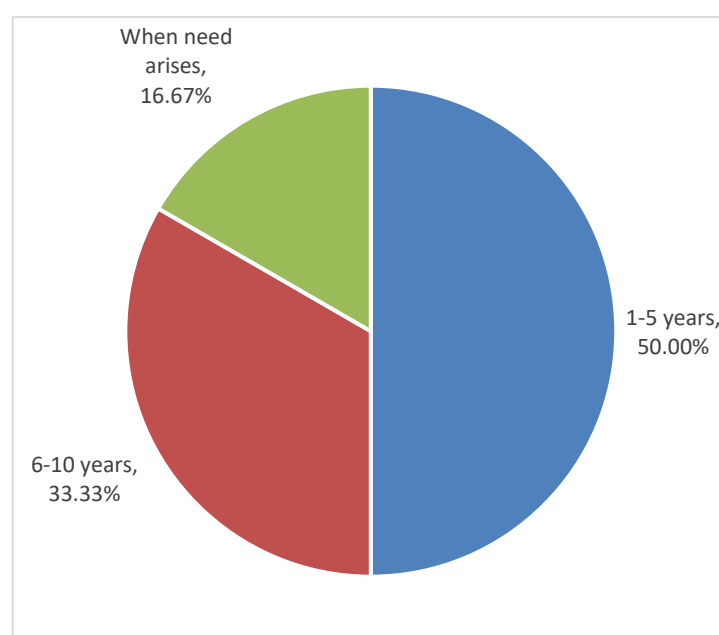
According to Figure 3, the study gathered that in 4 (66%) of the universities examined, LIS was in a standalone school named the School of Information Science and Technology. In the remaining two universities, LIS was a department within the School of Pure and Applied Science and the School of Information and Media Studies. This disparity is consistent with the findings of Ocholla and Bothma (2007). However, the emerging trends in the LIS field have seen departments changing

their names. This is due to the discovery of the interdisciplinary nature of the LIS program, which reflects the breadth, depth, and diversity of careers requiring LIS knowledge and skills (Abubakar, 2021; Salawu & Igwe, 2018).

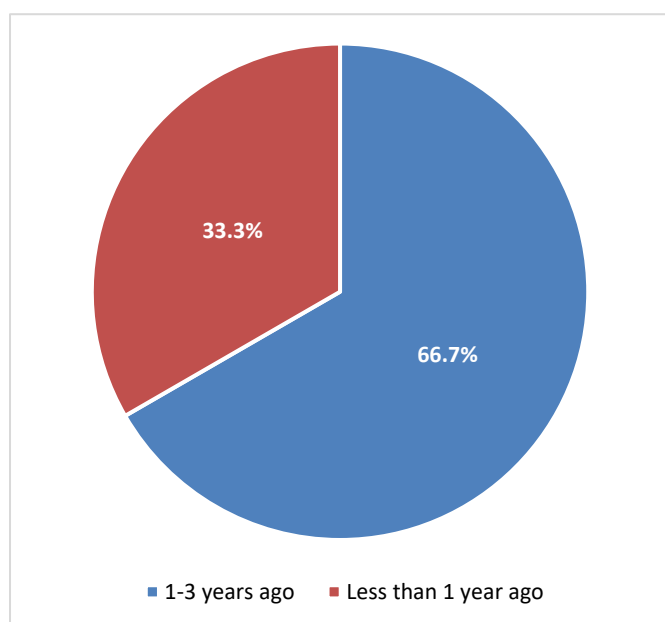
B. LIS Curriculum Review and Suitability

The study also sought to establish the frequency at which the LIS curriculum was reviewed to keep up with the changes in the LIS trends and the market needs. This would help to determine the suitability of the curricula in the various institutions under investigation in the digital era. Figure 4 shows the results.

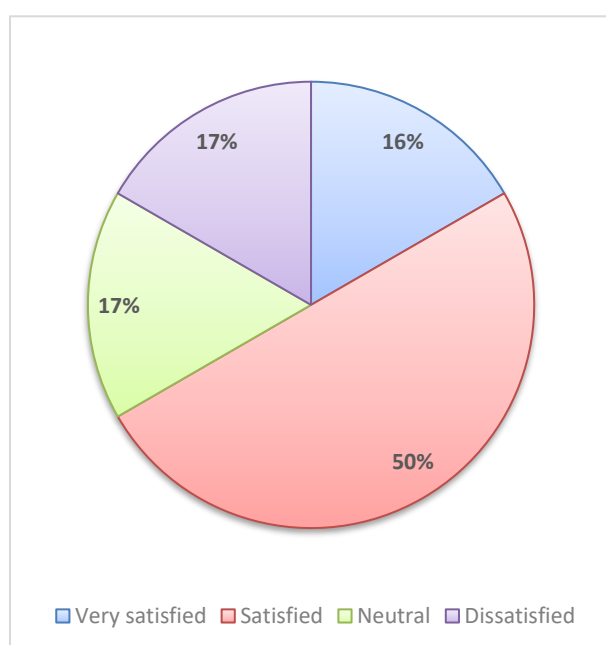
Figure 4: LIS Curriculum Review



The study found out that 3 (50%) of the six universities that responded reviewed their LIS curriculum every five years, 2 (33.3%) reviewed the curriculum every ten years, and 1 (16.7%) reviewed its LIS curriculum when there was a need. The curricula in the investigated institutions had been reviewed recently, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: When Curriculum last reviewed

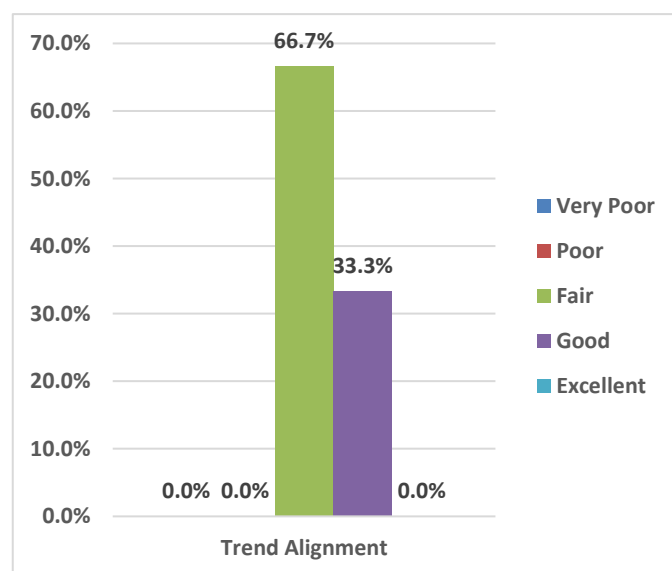
According to Figure 5, four (66.7%) of the universities had their curriculum reviewed within the last three years, while in 2 (33.3%), the review was done less than a year ago. The study proceeded to determine whether the heads of the LIS departments were satisfied with the current LIS curriculum. This was to enable the researchers to understand whether the curriculum was meeting the current standards. The results are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: General satisfaction

From the results shown in Figure 6, three out of the six heads of departments (50%) expressed satisfaction with the current curriculum's ability to prepare LIS graduates for the workforce, 1 (16.7%) expressed extreme satisfaction, 1 (16.7%) expressed neutrality, and the remaining 1 (16.7%) expressed dissatisfaction. In addition, LIS curricula vary across Kenyan institutions. This could be the reason for different opinions on the satisfaction of the curriculum to adequately prepare LIS graduates for the demand of the profession. This is echoed by the Rotich (2021) study that examined the LIS curriculum at four universities in Kenya. The findings showed that the LIS curricula at the four universities were not standardized. These findings are also noted in India, where Yadav's (2022) survey noted variations among the LIS schools in the allocation of topics and credits. This is a challenge facing LIS education in various nations, as noted by Xue et al. (2019). In their study, they noted course delivery format and content as the challenges facing LIS education in China and the United States.

C. Alignment of the curriculum with current trends

The study sought to evaluate whether the current LIS curricula in the institutions were aligned with current LIS trends, especially in technology. The study found that 4 (66.7%) of the heads of department reported that the current LIS curriculum was fairly aligned with the emerging technological trends in the LIS field, while 2 (33.3%) reported that the alignment was good, as shown in Figure 7 below. These findings align with those of Agava and Underwood (2020), who reported low ICT competencies among librarians to execute ICT-related library tasks.

Figure 7: Alignment with the current trends

D. Suggested Improvement to the current LIS curriculum

A question was posed to the Heads of Departments to suggest areas for improvement in the current LIS curriculum in their institutions. Table 1 gives a summary of the suggestions given by the respondents

Table 1: Areas of Improvement

<i>Areas of the curriculum that require improvement</i>	<i>Competencies/skills that require more emphasis</i>
ICT coverage, data capture and analysis	Information system development
The curriculum should embrace more practical aspects as opposed to theory	Competence-based education and training should take a central role in the curriculum
Information organisation and management, Communication and writing skills, Information system for libraries.	Communication skills, public relations, and cyber infrastructure-based information services.
Practical	Computer literacy
Integrating modern technologies (big data analytics and AI)	Programming for information services providers
Pedagogy	ICT skills

In support of the above suggestion, a study by Agava and Underwood (2020) recommended the introduction of more practical ICT-related programs and internships so that the graduates can acquire relevant skills for the job market. This is also consistent with Ariele et al (2017) recommendation for the provision of functional and well-equipped practical laboratories for LIS students. Other scholars, including Amunga and Khayesi (2012), Kavulya (2007), Ocholla and Shongwe (2013), and

Edegbo (2011), also recommended practical work, internships, and voluntary work.

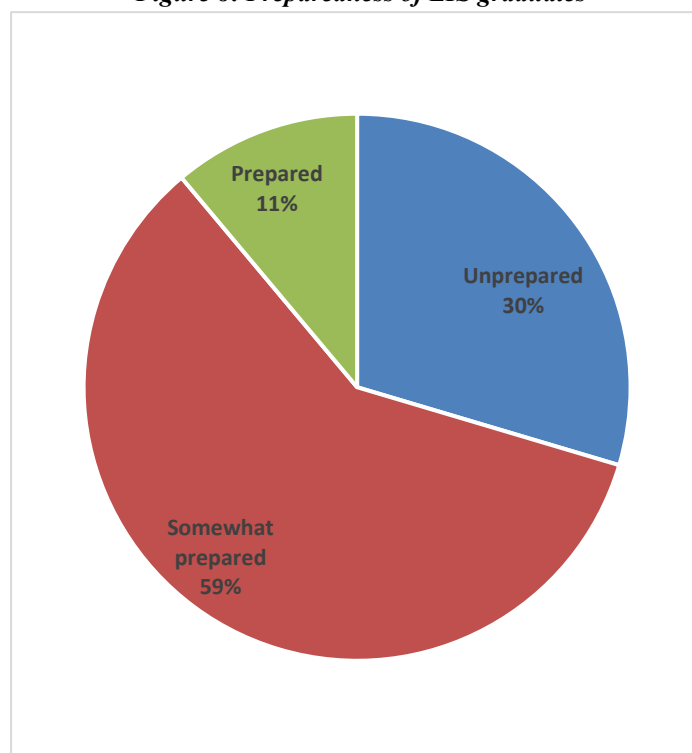
Preparedness of LIS graduates for digital librarianship

The study's second objective was to examine the preparedness of LIS graduates for digital librarianship. The research questions related to this objective were directed to the industry practitioners. The results are as discussed below:

A. Overall preparedness of current LIS graduates

The study sought to establish what the librarians' opinions were about the preparedness of the current LIS graduates for the digital era. The results were as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Preparedness of LIS graduates



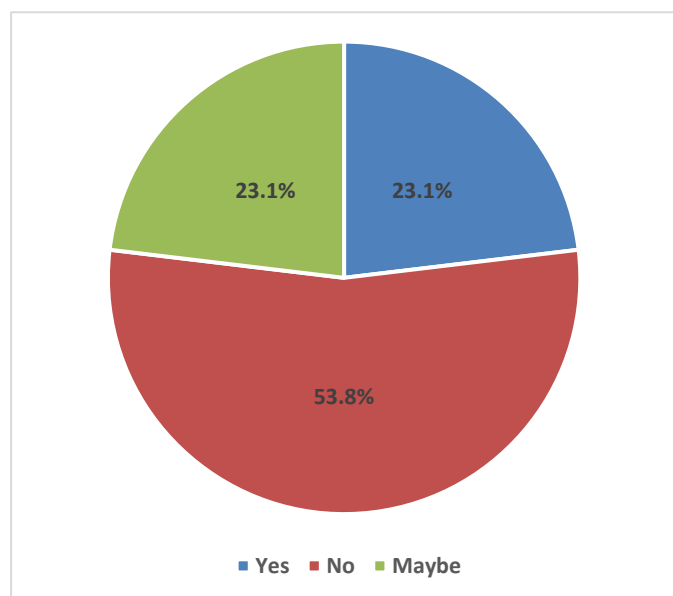
As shown in Figure 8, 17 (59%) of the respondents indicated that the graduates were somewhat prepared, 8 (30%) felt the graduates were prepared, while 3 (11%) reported that the graduates were unprepared. This shows that despite the fact that 4 (66.7%) of the HODs felt that the LIS curricula adequately addressed the demand of the profession, there seemed to be a mismatch between what was taught and what the LIS profession skill market demands. These findings are consistent with a study conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam that reported the LIS master's curriculum did not fully fulfil

all the expectations and needs of the graduates, employers, and society (Kassim et al., 2023). Similar results demonstrate that there is a mismatch between the abilities taught in the LIS and the skills required for the labor market documented in different nations (Katuli-Munyoro & Mutula, 2019; Yadav, 2022; Akhilesh, 2022). Notably, these studies have called for curriculum reviews that contradict the findings of our study, where all sampled universities had reviewed their curriculum within the last five years, and there was still a mismatch between the skills required in the job market and the skills imparted.

B. LIS graduates' understanding of the emerging trends

The study assessed the librarians' opinions about the current LIS graduates' understanding of the emerging trends in librarianship. The results were as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Understanding of emerging trends



As shown in figure 9 above, 16 (53.8%) of the respondents indicated that current LIS graduates had no understanding of the emerging trends in the LIS profession. Six or 23.1% of the respondents felt the graduates understood the emerging trends while the remaining 6 (23.1%) indicated that the graduates somehow had an understanding of the emerging trends. This means that few LIS graduates are conversant with the emerging trends in the LIS profession

C. Suggestions by librarians

Regarding the gaps that were coming up on what is taught and what the skills expected are, the librarians suggested the following:

- *The program to be more practical-oriented especially in ICT emerging trends in LIS*
- *Teach exactly what is expected in the working environment, e.g. Introduce and practice KOHA, Digital repositories, off campus software's etc.*
- *To train librarians to fit in this technology driven society where library users' needs have changed greatly due to the advent of the Internet.*
- *Some of the courses may be out of date and some new ones maybe of no use*
- *Learn research and editing skills*
- *Continuous learning, monitor the developments in the in the digital space and the impact it has on 'Information'*
- *Collaborate with diverse Communities of Practice both Global and Local level such as KM4Dev, Africa KM Community and Information Society of Kenya*
- *Provide Professional Development Opportunities encourage Lifelong Learning*
- *Foster Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills*
- *Develop Communication and Interpersonal Skills*

From the suggestions given above, to adequately prepare graduates for the complexities of the modern workforce, a stronger emphasis on practical application and industry alignment within educational curricula is crucial. This would involve incorporating more hands-on experiences that reflect current industry trends and technologies. For instance, curriculum design should prioritize practical sessions that expose students to the specific tools, software, and methodologies actively utilized in various professional environments.

Graduates would acquire the practical skills required to prosper in a technologically advanced society and obtain a better grasp of daily operations by incorporating real-world scenarios and case studies. By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, this experiential learning approach also cultivates a proactive mind set in students, equipping them to foresee and adjust to changing technological landscapes.

Standardizing and improving skill sets can also be greatly aided by developing strong partnerships with various communities of practice, like the Information Society of Kenya. These collaborations can help create educational

programs that are directly responsive to the needs of the labor market, promote the sharing of knowledge, and offer insightful information about the industry. These kinds of partnerships can also lead to joint projects, internships, and mentoring opportunities, which will increase graduates' practical readiness even more. Ultimately, a comprehensive strategy that blends hands-on instruction with industry partnerships will enable graduates to enter their chosen fields with ease and make valuable contributions to the contemporary economy.

V. CONCLUSION

From the findings discussed in the previous section, the study concluded that the alignment of the LIS curriculum is fair through frequent reviews across all institutions. However, different institutions have varying naming, and the course falls in varying departments across institutions. Despite the LIS curriculum review in various universities, the skills and competencies impacted in the classroom do not align with the current job market. The varying responses noted from the heads of department on the satisfaction level of the curriculum used suggest a lack of standardization on course content and format delivery. There is, therefore, a need to add more practical and more ICT coverage in order to cover the digital aspect of the course and profession. The study also concluded that the LIS graduates were fairly prepared for current emerging trends and for the current job market, but this can be

overcome through continuous professional development opportunities for lifelong learning and also collaboration with various communities of practice, such as the Information Society of Kenya (ISoK).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to fulfill the needs of the market, the curriculum should be adaptable enough to consider new trends and changing educational standards. Nonetheless, it must continue to be in line with the general objectives and standards of education.

Institutions offering LIS programs should be repositioned to be able to produce graduates that are adequately equipped for functions in the digital environment. This can only be accomplished by rethinking the LIS curriculum to take into account the aforementioned advancements and meet the needs of the new, technologically advanced information age. This entails curriculum harmonization, standardization, and collaborative review across institutions. To teach and give LIS graduates new skills and competencies that match the current market trend in LIS, faculty members with a range of abilities will be hired. In order to train librarians on new skills and competencies, professional associations like KLA should carry out training, evaluate needs, and work with other organizations like KLISC.

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