Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Improving Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in LIS Education: Insights for Curriculum Development and Professional Preparation

A Review of:
Drewry, C., Matsuno, S., Hicks, A., & Inskip, C. (2024). How could the Library and Information Studies curriculum better prepare graduates to address equity, diversity and inclusion issues in their workplace? *Journal of Information Science*. Advance online publication https://doi.org/10.1177/01655515241245960

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Abstract

Objective – To explore how the graduate-level Library and Information Studies (LIS) curriculum can be redesigned to be more socially justice focused and thus better prepare graduates to address equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues in their workplace.

Design – A cross-sectional, descriptive online survey study.

Setting – MA/PG Diploma program in LIS at University College, London (UCL).

Subjects – 59 recent graduates from the MA/PG Diploma program in LIS at University College, London (UCL).

Methods – Using the descriptive survey methodology, a 13-item online questionnaire was sent to a purposive sample of 733 alumni from the MA/PG Diploma program in LIS at University College, London (UCL). The online survey included 7 closed question and 6 open-ended questions, and was open for 6 weeks. Survey responses were analyzed using thematic coding in NVIVO software to identify key trends and insights.

Main Results – Regarding effective pedagogical strategies for EDI-focused work, a notable theme was the importance of personal identity in understanding and engaging with EDI issues. Respondents mentioned that their own experiences of marginalization, promotion to management roles, and personal study, helped them recognize the significance of EDI in their professional lives and understand the broad array of protected characteristics in their EDI work. Group work and community building were also identified as crucial for effective EDI education. Respondents noted that working collaboratively, both in professional associations and with colleagues, helped them maintain motivation and deepen their understanding of EDI issues. Workshops, discussion groups, and online forums were highlighted as valuable tools for fostering these connections and promoting shared understandings. Another key theme was the need to embed an EDI ethos throughout the entire curriculum rather than isolating it in specific modules. Respondents advocated for integrating EDI principles into all aspects of LIS education, including lectures, reading lists, and course content to ensure a holistic approach. Gaps in the curriculum were also noted. First, there was a lack of training in management and leadership, particularly in areas like inclusive hiring practices and managing diverse teams. Respondents felt unprepared to address these practical challenges, which are critical for nurturing a diverse and equitable workplace. Second, fostering learner positionality needs to be strengthened in the curriculum. Positionality refers to how differences in social position, identity, and power dynamics shape individuals' experiences and access to opportunities. Without developing an understanding of these dynamics, students may struggle to fully grasp the complexities of marginalization or may inadvertently impose their perspectives on others. Lastly, respondents highlighted the need to broaden the scope of EDI education to address all protected characteristics under UK law, not just race and ethnicity.

Conclusion – Three effective pedagogical strategies and three curricular gaps were identified to help LIS graduate programs to improve their EDI-focused curriculum. Specific approaches such as embedding EDI throughout the curriculum, encouraging students to reflect on their own identities and experiences with marginalization, and promoting collaborative activities were recommended. In the process of curricular form, educators need to be mindful about the tensions related to the pressure placed on those from marginalized communities to share their experiences and lead EDI work, challenging existing structures, and performative diversity. Lessons from archival practices can be considered, such as adopting trauma-informed practices when engaging with communities that have experienced historical or ongoing harm, and shifting towards more relational and person-centered approaches to build relationships with diverse user groups.

Commentary

This study offers valuable insights into how the LIS curriculum can better equip graduates to address equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues in their professional lives. Examined under the CRiSTAL Checklist for Appraising a User Study (n.d.), this study is strong in the following areas: 1) the authors clearly stated their research question; 2) the data collection instrument (an online survey) had face validity and content validity; and 3) suggestions for EDI-focused curricular reform were properly informed by the survey results and the literature.

The authors acknowledged several limitations that affect the generalizability of the study findings. One major limitation is the small sample size, with only 59 valid responses from 733 survey invitations, yielding a response rate of just 8%. This low response rate limits the study's representativeness and makes it difficult to draw broader conclusions applicable to a wider range of

LIS programs or graduates. Additionally, the study focused on graduates from a single UK-based LIS program, which restricts the geographical and institutional diversity of perspectives. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other LIS schools or international contexts. Additionally, the authors pointed out underrepresentation of certain demographics within its sample, further limiting the study's generalizability. This underrepresentation could skew the findings and leave out crucial perspectives, particularly from marginalized or underrepresented groups, which are vital to understanding the full scope of EDI challenges in the profession.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from an online questionnaire. While this method ensures anonymity and convenience for respondents, it also introduces potential biases such as social desirability bias, where respondents may provide answers they believe are expected or desirable rather than fully reflective of their experiences. Furthermore, the study did not allow for tracking individual responses across multiple questions, which restricted the ability to analyze correlations between different variables, such as demographic factors and specific EDI experiences.

The authors did provide a copy of the survey questionnaire as an appendix, allowing readers to more meaningfully assess the data collection instrument. Out of the 13 survey questionnaire times, 6 were open-ended questions. One downside of having a significant number of open-ended questions is that there are no opportunities for clarification or probing when respondents misinterpret the questions, leading to irrelevant or unclear responses. Thus, this qualitative approach, while valuable, may lack the depth that more extensive qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide. These methods might uncover richer, more nuanced insights into the complexities of EDI education in LIS.

Overall, a key strength of the study lies in its focus on practical, actionable strategies, such as embedding EDI across all coursework and leveraging personal identity and group work to deepen student engagement. Additionally, the study identifies specific gaps in leadership and management training, providing a targeted approach for improving professional preparation. Its relevance extends beyond the LIS field, offering a framework that can be adapted to other disciplines aiming to enhance EDI education and practices.

References

CRiSTAL checklist for appraising a user study. (n.d.). In *nettingtheevidence.pbwiki.com*. Retrieved August 10, 2023, from http://nettingtheevidence.pbwiki.com/f/use.doc

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