

# Pedagogy for Information Ethics in Library and Information Science Curricula in Public Universities in Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Concerns have been raised about the competencies and methodologies used in teaching information ethics in library and information science (LIS) curricula. It has been observed that the sharing of experiences in the information field in what is taught and why students engage in information ethics remains unexplored. There is no consensus on the pedagogy best suited for teaching and learning information ethics. Teaching information ethics requires a diverse range of teaching methods that facilitate ethical development through promoting students' cognitive, effective and social development. This study established that the main teaching methods used for ethics courses in library and information science curricula in four public universities in Kenya, were lectures and seminars, classroom discussions and case studies. The study concluded that the pedagogy used should take cognizance of the objective of information ethics education and be appropriate to the lecturer and the class.*

**Keywords:** Information ethics pedagogy, teaching methods, LIS curriculum.

## 1. Introduction

Information ethics refers to moral dilemmas and ethical conflicts emerging in society arising from interactions between human beings and information creation, organization, dissemination, transformation and use in the form of new technologies (Carbo and Smith, 2008, Capurro, 2010). It concerns human activity related to information regarding their relationship with information in the form of new technologies and innovations, which is the domain of information professionals (Babik, 2006). Scholars have argued for the necessity to integrate information ethics in LIS curricula in university (Kawooya, 2016; Mutula, 2011; Dadzie, 2011; Capurro, 2010; Carbo, 2005). The ALISE special interest group (2007) suggest that knowledge and understanding of the ethical conflicts and responsibilities facing library and information professionals are necessary to enable relevant teaching, learning and reflections in the field of library and information studies and information related professions. However, Buchanan and Ocholla (2009) observed that the sharing of experiences in the information field in how and what is taught, and how and why students engage in information ethics, remains virtually unexplored.

Concern has been raised about the competencies and methodologies used in teaching information ethics courses. Liu and Yang (2012) contend that since the goals of an information ethics course is to cultivating moral awareness and sensitivity, fostering critical thinking and developing discourse quality; instruments that directly evaluate those abilities are lacking. They suggest that the construction of globalized information ethics is urgently needed, with its focus placed on the combination of theory and practice to develop curriculum and the assessment of the learning outcomes of information ethics courses. Lee, Dark and Chen (2005) suggest that the teaching method should be used in a manner that allows students to have an experience in order to advance students' sense of ethics. Universities are ideally placed to play a pre-eminent role in developing and supporting ethical behaviour in their students through the marrying together of sound pedagogical practices,

appropriate technology and a conceptualization of information ethics. They have the power to influence awareness and knowledge of information ethics through their curricula (Maina, 2016).

Researchers have held different views about which pedagogy is best suited for teaching information ethics. Rikowski (2006) suggests the use of lectures and seminars, online collaboration tools, worksheets, storybooks, role playing, classroom discussions, brain storming sessions, use real life examples, news stories, developing billboards, conduct surveys, and speakers. Other teaching methods that could be employed include holding a trial or debate, having a breaking news class, designing discussion boards and showing movies (Beaton, n.d.). But, Lee, Dark and Chen (2005) stated that the teaching methods suitable for facilitating ethical development are those methods that promote the students' cognitive, effective and social development. They proposed case study, team education, group discussion and role modeling as suitable methods for moral development. In support, Liu and Yang (2012) suggest that adopting scenarios and role- playing and using case studies would increase learners' motivation, engage them in ethical behaviour, and clarify their values systems and worldviews. Ethics is caught and not taught, thus people should be inculcated into ethical behaviour (Garg and Camp, 2012). Therefore the teaching method should be used in a manner that allows students to have an experience in order to advance students' sense of ethics (Liu and Yang, 2012).

## 2. Methodology

The paper sought to establish the teaching methods used for information ethics courses in LIS schools in public universities in Kenya. The participants comprised 6 heads of department (HODs), 20 lecturers and 252 students drawn from LIS departments in four public universities in Kenya. It was informed by B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory (1948) which postulates that behaviour is modified through the use of positive and negative reinforcements. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect and the study was

guided by the following research questions:-a) Which pedagogy is used for information ethics in LIS schools? b) How adequate are these teaching methods for information ethics education? c) Who should teach information ethics course in LIS schools?

### **Pedagogy for Information Ethics in LIS Education in Kenya**

This study found that the main methods of instructions in LIS schools were lectures and seminars, classroom discussions and case studies. Students were asked to indicate the teaching methods used by their lecturers during information ethics courses and their responses are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Teaching Methods Used, n=252**

Teaching method	Response			
	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lecture and seminar	200	79.4	52	20.6
Class room discussions	189	75	63	25
Case studies	179	69.8	76	30.2
Real life examples	101	40.1	151	59.9
Speakers	90	35.7	162	64.3
Online collaborations	74	29.4	178	70.6
Role play	46	18.3	206	81.7

Responses from students showed that although a number of teaching methods were employed, lectures and seminars

(79.4%), classroom discussions (75%) and case studies (69.8%) were the main teaching methods. Lecturers strongly affirmed the findings from students by indicating that they preferred using lectures and seminars (70%), classroom discussions (60%) and case studies (40%) during information ethics classes. Literature has emphasized that to provide opportunities for active learning and enhance information ethics education, a combination of teaching methods should be used which incorporate models, diverse readings, active discussions and interaction among students, and perspective from outside speakers (Ndwandwe, Ocholla and Dube, 2009; Carbo, 2005).

Case study, team education and group discussion were considered suitable for facilitating ethical development (Lee, Dark and Chen 2005), but this study found that these teaching methods were rarely used in LIS departments in Kenya. Responses from students indicated that inviting speakers (35.7%), online collaboration tools (29.4%) and role playing (18.3%) were the least employed methods of instruction by their lecturers. Some teaching methods including storytelling, online collaboration tools and discussion boards which were considered alternative pedagogy for information ethics (Rikowski, 2006) were not used in any of the universities.

### **Adequacy of Teaching Methods Used for IE Education**

Lecturer's responses on adequacy of teaching methods were analyzed and ranked according to the mean score in a five-point scale as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Ranking of Teaching Methods<sup>a</sup>, n=20**

Method	Very inadequate	Inadequate	Adequate	Very adequate	Score <sup>b</sup>	Mean <sup>c</sup>
Lecture/seminar	0	2	8	10	68	3.4
Classroom discussions	0	4	10	6	62	3.1
Case studies	2	7	8	3	52	2.6
Role play	4	8	8	0	44	2.2
Real life	6	7	5	2	43	2.15
Online collaborations	13	5	0	2	31	1.55
Speakers	12	6	2	0	30	1.5

<sup>a</sup> Teaching methods ranked in terms of their adequacy of use in IE course

<sup>b</sup> Score was calculate as (Freq. inadequate\*1) + (Freq. adequate\*2) + (Freq. Very adequate\*3)

<sup>c</sup> Mean was calculated as (Score/ Sample size(n=20))

The findings indicated that lecturers adequately employed lectures and seminars (3.4), classroom discussions (3.1) and case studies (2.6) as teaching methods for teaching information ethics. In contrast, the study pointed out that employing teaching methods which provide opportunities for active learning and enhance ethics education were considered inadequate for role play (2.2) and real life examples (2.15), while online collaboration tools (1.55) and speakers (1.5) were very inadequately employed. These findings corroborate the responses by students on the teaching methods used for learning information ethics courses.

Several factors affected the choice of the pedagogy including large sizes of classes, limited time allocated to a course and lack of orientation to some pedagogy. While acknowledging there is a high students' population in

classes, a lecturer remarked that the classes were so big to employ teaching methods designed for small groups. The rare usage of some of these teaching methods could also be attributed to the requirement associated with these instruction methods. The study found that in order to use speakers as a mode of delivery, it must be shown in the curriculum to support facilitation of the invited speaker. This implies that before a speaker is invited, prior arrangements must be made pegged on the curriculum.

Regarding the course duration, the course content for a course has to be covered within the allocated time, which is a challenge because information ethics is integrated in other mainstream LIS courses. The purpose for information ethics education is moral development, but respondents indicated that information ethics content was dispersed in other courses and time was inadequate for student to interrogate

the discourse on ethics with their course instructor. The common practice in LIS departments was to integrate information ethics aspects in mainstream LIS courses including information literacy, professional associations and legal aspects of information (Otiike and Maina, 2013). The study recommended for fully fledged information ethics course because it was considered to provide sufficient time, in-depth coverage and specific content on information ethics issues.

In addition, a few lecturers expressed that they were not competent in some pedagogies recommended for information ethics. The findings established that none of the universities studied had inducted their teaching staff on some pedagogical methods including those recommended for information ethics courses. One lecturer stated that the method of teaching does not matter but what matters is how it is employed. This statement concurs with Fallis (2007) who argued that despite the teaching method used, the ultimate responsibility for their effective use depends on the instructor. From the arguments, the teaching method used should be appropriate to the lecturer and the class being taught. However, the pedagogy used should facilitate the objective of the information ethics course, which is to elicit desired ethical behavior among LIS students as postulated by Skinner's operant conditioning theory (Boeree, 2006), as well as equip them with knowledge in information ethics.

### **3. Who Teaches Information Ethics in LIS Schools**

The study established that information ethics is derived from various disciplines, thus mastery and command of content in ethics was likely to influence the choice of teaching method. Since information ethics is multidisciplinary in nature, it was considered necessary to establish the academic background of lecturers teaching information ethics courses in terms of academic departments and areas of knowledge and expertise (Ocholla, 2009; Ndwandwe, 2010). The findings showed that all the lecturers who taught information ethics had a LIS background, with specialization in Library Studies, Records Management, Knowledge Management and IT. This finding is supported by Fallis (2007) who asserted that information ethics courses should be taught by library and information science professionals who understand the ethical dilemmas facing information professionals and who have faced similar dilemmas. However, Carbo (2005) suggests that information ethics should be taught by knowledgeable and experienced persons.

This study strongly supported a multidisciplinary approach in teaching IE in LIS curriculum. Lecturers stated that the course should be taught by an authority in LIS and also have a background in ethics. They gave emphasis to a lecturer with an LIS (85%) background, followed by philosophy (55%) and sociology (35%). This finding was validated by HODs who preferred the course to be taught by a hybrid lecturer, with a command in LIS and with background knowledge in ethics. To provide the ethics background, suggestions were made to introduce ethics courses in LIS training and foster collaborations with departments like philosophy and sociology for proper coverage of the nature and concepts of ethics. It is however paramount to

appreciate that information ethics is drawn from various disciplines including philosophy and computer science.

With regard to teaching experience, majority (70%) of the lecturers had taught information ethics course for period less than two (0-2) years. This depicts the novelty of information ethics courses in LIS curriculum in Kenya confirming earlier studies (Limo, 2010; Kemoni, 2010; Otiike, 2010). The findings showed that none of the lecturers had received training in information ethics. Only a few (25%) of them had attended seminars and conferences in information ethics, with a lecturers citing lack of awareness of such conferences or seminars. This implied that the level of awareness of information ethics within the universities seemed to be very low even among the lecturers themselves. Scholars in information ethics in Kenya should embark on awareness programmes involving all the stakeholders in the university including students and teaching staff. Despite the absence of training in IE, lecturers were still motivated to teach the course, with the greatest motivating factor being the interest they had in the area. This interest provided the impetus to venture into information ethics even though the area was new to most of the lecturers. More so, lecturers reported that their universities provided support towards teaching information ethics, through procurement of e-resources to aid in teaching, development and implementation of curricula and curriculum reviews. It was also established that there was little awareness about IE which can be harnessed to provide a better understanding and appreciation of the course.

### **4. Conclusion**

It is becoming increasingly necessary to integrate information ethics in LIS curricula in universities. However, there is no consensus on which teaching methods are best suited for teaching and learning information ethics. This study recommended a multidisciplinary approach to be employed and the use of diverse range of teaching methods that facilitate ethical development. The study concluded that the pedagogy used should take cognizance of the objective of information ethics education which is to advance moral development and also be appropriate to the lecturer and the students.

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