

Chapter 3

Diversity, Indigenous Knowledge, and LIS Pedagogy: Conceptualizing Formal Education in Library and Information Studies in Vanuatu

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ABSTRACT

While the rest of the world discusses how Library and Information Studies (LIS) can best cope with the emerging trends in technology and global information platforms, there are parts of the world that do not offer LIS programs. This chapter provides insights on the development of LIS qualification that recognizes the needs of librarians in Vanuatu. The Ni-Vanuatu competency index serves as a reference for the skills required to deliver services and resources to their clients. The importance of having a functional program that integrates the uniqueness of Vanuatu's cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge is the primary discussion for this chapter. It is too early to discuss the steps for meeting the criteria for the qualifications framework as the program is not in place. Still, the focus of what kind of LIS Education suits Ni-Vanuatu librarians is the beginning of the conversation.

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BACKGROUND

Vanuatu is a country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, consisting of a chain of 13 principal and many smaller islands (Vanuatu, 2019). Formerly the jointly administered Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides, Vanuatu achieved independence in 1980. The indigenous population, called Ni-Vanuatu or Ni-Van (which means from the Land), are mainly Melanesian, though some of the outlying islands have Polynesian people (Adams & Foster, 2019). Three major languages are spoken in Vanuatu: English, French, and Bislama. The latter is an English-based Melanesian pidgin which is the national language (Tryon, 1998). Still, from a linguistic standpoint, there are 113 extant indigenous languages spoken today for a population of only 170,000 (Tryon, 1997, in 1998).

The first public library in the region started only with a small Vanuatu collection, mostly written by international authors and scholars. It was in the 1950s when Vanuatu (then New Hebrides) was still an Anglo-French Condominium, that both the French and British government collaborated (for the first time) to build the National Cultural Center building where artifacts and other local custom and cultural knowledge were stored. The very purpose of the two governments is to preserve traditional culture. One part of the building is a place for manuscripts and books about Vanuatu. This started the collection for what is now the Vanuatu National Library (VNL). It took decades before the Public Library was fully established, with staff having a degree in library discipline. More than a decade after its independence (June 30, 1980), the government established a duly recognized National Library. In 1995, when the Vanuatu Cultural Center was moved to a new place, the VNL was also transferred. VNL now shares the space with the Vanuatu National Archives. Libraries were under the Ministry of Justice until 2018. There is no concrete funding, and no law has been passed on the development of the VNL. VNL oversees four Municipality Libraries, which include: Port Vila, Santo, Malekula and Tanna.

At present, there are about 50 Ni-Van members of the Vanuatu Library Association (VLA). Training is done by the Association, depending on the availability of funds. Another source of preparation for school librarians is the Presbyterian Church Vanuatu Education Authority (PCVE). Since 2011, PCVE has identified the need to assist school libraries and librarians by up-skilling their basic knowledge on how to set up and manage a school library through various training. PCVE also produced a booklet/workbook on how to manage a school library to assist school librarians in being able to make a difference in their work environment to promote reading. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian High Commission donated financial resources and the Ministry of Education & Training (MOET) who supported and granted PCVE permission to conduct the training. The Vanuatu Institute of Technology and Education (VITE) supports the training

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