TRENDS IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

The work studies the scenario of library and information science education in South Asia. South Asia countries consist of seven countries, out of these seven India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh has provision for LIS-education. Changing social priorities and development in IT are driving the emergence of new library education. Dedicated, technical and well qualified professionals can lead to better library and information services. LIS-education in South Asia is offered at various levels range from certificate, diploma degree, M.Phil and Ph.D. These LIS-education programmes course are offered on regular basis as well as through correspondence or distance education. Library and information science is slowly becoming popular, student with higher qualification are joining the course. The situation of the South-Asia countries is quite different from the developed countries. South Asia countries main emphasis is laid on traditional aspects, cataloguing and classification dominate the curriculum. The course content of the region is not meeting the requirement of the emerging job opportunities in the multinational companies. There is lack of consistency between LIS-education and practice. Traditional chalk and talk teaching is not adequately supplemented with new teaching technique aid method. Strength and reputation of LIS course depends on the teaching standards with adequate faculty strength with good academic record, up-to-date knowledge of knowledge of the subject and adequate teaching experience.

Introduction

Library and Information Science Education is a complex patchwork. That is the case for LIS-research and it is the case for LIS-Education. Although LIS as an academic and educational undertaking has common historical roots related to the need or qualified staff in libraries, research and education has developed in different direction. Some of the dividing lines are *a) from being vocational education, LIS gradually established itself as a research-based academic undertaking. However, there is relatively big difference how far and how fast different schools and countries have moved on the road toward Academia b) LIS becomes a generalized information science c) the degree to which LIS-educations are integrated into the academic system of degrees from bachelor via master to the doctoral level also varies; d). LIS is a multidisciplinary undertaking, varying from mathematics and computer science via the social science to the literary sciences*.

With the emergence of national educational structure in nineteenth-century educators' travel to distant corners of the earth in search of methods they could adapt by studying educational systems in other countries. The 1990s saw a rise in the number of professional societies dealing with LIS-education. Librarianship itself has experience radical change in the face of new technology and transformation in information materials. Academic and scientific circles were transformed bas a result of electronic communication media and ease in exchange of information. These changes have made their mark on higher education, especially on traditional LIS-education (Mortezaie, Lila and Naghshineh, 2002 pp.14-23). Graduate and post-graduate programs in library and information science are growing in size and scope. Many universities recognized the opportunities of this dynamic field and have invested significant new resources into these programs. Formal education for LIS began in the late nineteenth century. The nineteenth century called the scholarly era saw the emergence of two scientific disciplines from the genus of librarianship- Classification and cataloguing, which today are most of the wanton areas in knowledge processing and organization of the electronic era. However these fields suffer from such concepts as the 'digital divide', meaning the differences in the technological competencies of the countries, which make the difference in quality and skills vary among the developed and developing countries. Hence some of these issues have to be addressed to younger generation through LIS-education

and training. For sustainable development of a nation, ICT has become essential to every nation and more so to the developing nation (Karisiddappa, C R, 2004).

South Asia consists of seven countries, out of these seven India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh has provision for LIS-education. Others three countries, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives depend on outside support for education and training. Changing social priorities and development in IT are driving the emergence of new library that will be organized in a new way to deliver new services. This implies changes in LIS-education Asia region, but many countries in the region are lagging behind in the usage of ICT in LIS-education. As Edwards (2001) points out, Knowledge society is upon us but with formidable challenges and developing the appropriate skills and the content is the real challenges that building infrastructure. Will there be equitable access or a growing divide between the info-rich and info-poor, will content be varied and appropriate are some of the issues raised by the author. He raised the issue of info-digital divide between developed and developing countries.

Lack of relevance of LIS-graduate is not common to developed countries but also true in the developing countries. Dedicated, technical and well qualified professionals can only lead to better library and information services but, traditional LIS-graduate will not be able to cope with challenges because lack of training and leadership quality. Haider (2004) suggests that universities in Pakistan need to make use of technical manager and business manager for top managerial positions in the university libraries. This suggestion is revolutionary but necessary in the best interest of the libraries he claims. This is transforming information of the danger of six Pakistan library schools based in the universities which produce 250-300 Master graduate a year. Sri Lanka's current social and economic plan Mahinda Chintana (Rajapaksha 2005) stresses a verity of activities to empower the rural population including self employment opportunities for rural women, more use of technology for agricultural and other industries etc. Can the library school graduates, who learn more cataloguing and classification, cater to change or will the other such as IT professional will cross the LIS boundaries to grab the new employment opportunities will remain to be seen (Jagtar and Pradeepa, 2006). The library education system was started in Bangladesh before her independence; the country has almost fifty years of LIS education history. Existing body of literature shows that in India there is a mushrooming growth of LIS-education department. There is no professional accreditation, though institutional accreditation is in place in India. The number of LIS-education program in India as follows: 120 universities offering bachelor degree, 78 are offering master's degree, 21 are offering two-year integrated course, 16 universities are offering M.Phil degree, and 63 are offering Ph.D degree. India maintains its Third World leadership in library research in library education and literature (Satija, 1998, pp.21).

Levels of LIS-Education in South Asia

The LIS-education in South Asia is offered at various levels range from certificate, diploma degree, M.Phil and Ph.D. These LIS-education programmes course are offered on regular basis as well as through correspondence or distance education. There are five levels of LIS-education programmes in Pakistan ranging from elective at bachelor level to Ph.D level. In Bangladesh it varies from Certificate course in LIS, Postgraduate diploma in LIS, B.A (Honours) in LIS, M.A. in LIS, M.Phil and Ph.D level at universities (Islam and Chowdhury, 2006 pp. 358-363), in addition there are two certificate courses aiming to train school librarians. LIS-education in Sri Lanka range from module in B.Ed programme through certificate level to two-year master programme. Higher academic qualifications are not available. In India the levels of courses ranges from certificate course, undergraduate diploma course, post-graduate diploma course, bachelor in library and information science (BLIS), master in library and information science (MLIS), associateship in information science, advanced training course in information system management and technology, M.Phil, Ph.D and D.Litt. programme. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, universities seem to play major role in LIS-education, training professional at the university level. In Sri Lanka student are trained by the Sri Lankan Library Association (SLLA) and department of library and information science (DLIS), while universities play a major role in training few at higher level. None of these LIS-educational programmes in South Asia countries are accredited ay any organization.

Entry Requirements

Library and information science is slowly becoming popular, student with higher qualification are joining the course but they are not enthusiastic in opting for library science as their first choice of preference. Therefore more attention in selection criteria is needed to attract the best in the program. To attract middle level talent incentive like scholarship and fellowship are required. Merit should not be the only criteria for admitting the students, admission test and interview must adopted to select the best talent, with good communication skill, love for books, aptitude towards librarianship and desired to serve others. Entry requirement are less stringent in Sri Lanka as compared to those of other South Asia countries. To get admission to bachelor in LIS, India and Pakistan require good bachelor degree in any discipline. According to Mangla (1994) most Indian library school consider with good master degree in any disciplines for admission to bachelor's degree. Student in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh need GCE/AL qualification to get admission to bachelor's in LIS. But in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh bachelor in LIS is a 3-4 year course, while in India and Pakistan

it is one-year programme. Although the duration is of one-year, India and Pakistan bachelor in LIS students are more mature then their counterpart countries in South Asia because the students undergone prior university training. However, Indian UGC (1993) recommends that admission test and interview should become the criteria for selection so that best academic qualifications, as well as best personal qualities are selected. In India, the UGC model Curriculum in LIS, released in 2001 suggested adoption of two-year integrated M.Lib.I.Sc Course [(7)].

Entry requirement for master degree in LIS, in Sri Lanka required good bachelor degree in any discipline plus one year work experience in a recognized library. Bachelor in LIS qualification is essential for admission to master degree course in the other South Asia countries. Though the duration of Sri Lankan masters degree is of two year, only the first year (300 hours) is devoted to theoretical study, second year is completely to the research and writing up of dissertation of 30,000-40,000 words. Master degree is the highest academic qualification available in Sri Lanka for managerial level professionals as well as LIS educators, therefore can produce professionals with only one year of formal training in LIS. Quality of pre-course experience and the amount of research undertaken for the dissertation can widely very according to the personal qualities, place of work, academic capabilities of the student. Mangla (1978) comments on this aspect, "we have found the fresh students to be more mentally alert with a great amount of curiosity to learn the subject than those who are admitted with some prior experience."

Scenario of Course Contents, Syllabus and Curriculum in South Asia Countries

The situation of the South-Asia countries is quite different from the developed countries. There is indication that in this region there is shift in focus from recordable information and knowledge media to access to electronic media, especially the Internet, where the access to this facility is limited by non-existence. To the end of the 20th Century, the South Asian countries have three main characteristics of developments related to information: a) information being considered as an economic resource b) increase in use of information by the common public and c) growth of information sector in the economic sector. It is often felt that in the developing countries are following the west, and seek expert consultation from those coming from west, but this is not so compatible, as Lester Asheim said, despite the parallels and contrast of systems and services, there is a uniqueness about these countries, in the diversity of situations the countries hold in education, culture, economy, technology and other conditions. The situation in developing countries is therefore different as far as of regions are considered. Though the developing countries are making efforts to adapt to changing situations, the situation requires a gradual ascent from the base to the top, from learning the fundamentals to the specific applications (Karisiddappa, C R, 2004).

In South Asia countries main emphasis is laid on traditional aspects, cataloguing and classification dominate the curriculum. Library management, information source and services also are equally popular in the region. LIS syllabi are quite old and need to be restructured with redefined objectives to accommodate emerging changes in libraries, IT in libraries and expectation of users. Though the courses are designated as library and information science, there is little or no element of information science in the programme. Any attempts to change or development of curricular and service attitude seem to be lacking throughout the region. Literature available from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh it is evident that realized the necessity to change. Moreover the course content of the region is not meeting the requirement of the emerging job opportunities in the multinational companies. The core course area is still struck to classification, cataloguing, indexing and vocabulary control, the emerging themes, information science, knowledge management, e-learning, ICT application, application of network in teaching, search technique, library marketing have not been adequately included in the curricula. In reality there is lack of consistency between LIS-education and practice. Analysis of course content reveals that LIS programme in South Asia concentrate mainly on training students to manage a library by providing in-depth knowledge of traditional library practice. Trainees are provided with basic knowledge level of traditional library practices. In India and Pakistan options to specialize subject is provided. In India master programme are provide with a choice of bibliography and literature in humanities, social science, natural science, medical, agricultural, engineering and special libraries. Another option given is to select dissertation topic or any one form computer application, operation research, system analysis or LIS education. University of Karachi offers a selection of library types in the first semester, and library legislation, library automation, AV material, archives and other options are provided in second semester (Jagtar and Pradeepa, 2006). There is a wide disparity in the courses, duration, number and name of papers, contents, number of lectures and practical, method of teaching and evaluation, and grading system. Therefore, it become essential that curricula be revised by reducing emphasis on traditional technique and philosophical aspects to introduce emerging areas such as marketing of product and services, knowledge management, information system online information system, information processing and retrieval system and information and communication technology. Revised curriculum must be capable for preparing the future professionals to meet the challenges enforced cooperate sector. Provision for training placement, job placement or internship is lacking in the region.

Intake and Admission Procedures

Admission of student has been a problem for many of the departments. Admission criteria should be based on sound principles relating to manpower requirements but this is not so in Indian and South Asia education setting. Many prospective students consider LIS as a 'quite' profession and the applicants for the course mainly carry this kind of personalities. On the contrary, LIS department expect their students to be extrovert personality, entrepreneurial flair, and an ability to work well as a team member. With the evolving status of LIS profession, professionals, and the professional education has become a challenge to the LIS departments. LIS department expect to enrolment of 'good' students, but more often than not, have to be satisfied with the 'leftovers', as commented by one of the Sri Lankan LIS course co-coordinators, to maintain financial viability of the departments. This issue has led to closer of many schools of LIS around the world during the recent years. Indian UGC review Committee Report (1965, p.39) recommended the ratio between teacher and students at BLIS and MLIS is to be 1:10 and 1:15 respectively, which can ideally help to develop competent LIS professionals. But the ground reality is that in many schools, there is only one full-time teacher assisted by part-time teachers and personals form the library teaching courses up to Ph.D level. This has result in large number of students graduating without adequate exposure to theory and practice, therefore producing graduate with sub-standard training which create problem for unemployment. To produce LIS profession which is capable of obtaining jobs before the announcement of the examination results, this will be possible if accreditation of LIS schools becomes essential, number of schools and seat are kept limited, and quality of education is maintained. This will also raise the status of the profession and provide wider recognition and acceptance in the society. Therefore, to produce quality LIS manpower, student's intake should give due importance keeping in view of the need of job market.

Teaching Faculty

The nature of teaching faculty creates several problems in the LIS educational field. In Sri Lanka 94% of the LIS teaching faculty is employed full time in executive posts in library and information service. The situation is quite similar with India and Pakistan at their initial stages, in late 1950s teaching faculty in library schools of India consisted of part-time usually drawn from the respective university, and universities library functioned as the head of the school. Indian UGC committee in 1965 recognized the need for full time teacher at the school. Indian UGC panel on library and information science in 1982 recommended that a university department of library and information science should have adequate full time teaching staff and also full time head (Mangla, 1994). Karachi library school, which was started in Pakistan conducted classes with part time teachers. Other South Asia countries followed the same pattern at the initial stage. However, the position has changed during the past 20 years, but still the problem is not yet solved because of rang of subject to be taught and lack of qualified teachers. Conditions in Bangladesh seem closed to that of Sri Lanka. No provision is made for higher education and training facilities of teacher in the library and information science. Dhaka library school (1959) was opened with part time staff and university librarian as the head of the school. At present the school has one professor, four associate professors and four assistant professor, but Rajshahi University and Library Association of Bangladesh still conduct their courses with part time staff (Jagtar and Pradeepa, 2006). Moreover no organization is directly responsible for their career development as teacher; there is no opportunity for continuing education professional education and training. Traditional chalk and talk teaching is not adequately supplemented with new teaching technique aid method. Librarians in Sri Lanka are given a basic training to manage library information center. The highest qualifications i.e. master available to train with this objective and the curriculum has a limited scope. UGC review Committee in India rejected the practice of employing university library staff as part-time teachers and has recommended one reader and four lecturers for a department conducting the master (Singh 2003). However, India has experienced the adverse effects of the full time faculty. "It has resulted that full time faculty members have kept themselves aloof from the practical and clinical work in a library, thereby they have become theoreticians. Similarly experienced working librarians have been kept out from the teaching opportunity that could benefit the students" (Jagtar 2006).

Challenges and Issues of LIS Education

LIS-Education system of the South Asia countries has more similarities than difference. Major problems of the South Asia countries are the lack of training facilities for the teacher, limited teaching faculty, lack of resources, absence of manpower, limited or absent national level planning. For the past decade universities have made an unwarranted push toward establishing and developing LIS course, without proper groundwork. Lack of a national accreditation center, no national body is charged with enforcement. There is no national mechanism in place. To achieve academic excellence, it is of utmost importance that standards and norms of education are prescribed and adherence to them be made mandatory. This agency should be responsible for recommending minimum standards in terms of faculty strength, intake criteria, teacher-student ratio, library and laboratory facilities, finance and physical facilities etc. it should take care of regular revision of LIS syllabi for uniformity and standardization in the overall LIS education system. In 1976, IFLA in its annual conference passed a resolution that *"to maintain uniformity in the standards in the LIS Education programmes in the country, the Government of India be requested to created to create a library Science Council on the pattern of India Medical Council"* (Singh, 2003). Strength and reputation of LIS course depends on the teaching standards with adequate faculty strength with good academic record, up-to-date knowledge of knowledge of the subject and adequate teaching experience. Indian UGC Review Committee (1956) rejected the

practice of employing the university library staff as part-time teachers and recommended one reader and two lecturers for a department conducting BLIS programme and one professor, two readers and four lecturers for a department conducting the MLIS. To face the technological challenges, more exciting faculty members are engaged themselves in Computer and IT related courses. New faculty positions are created and filling up with the LIS professionals having computer and IT related qualification. More continuing Education programmes (CEP) being organized in the field of computer and related technologies. LIS departments must plat an active role in organizing such courses. There is no government policy for LIS education system and LIS professionals in Bangladesh. This has led to loose or decrease the professional dignity of the LIS professionals. There is no ways of getting together all academicians and professionals in Bangladesh at one time in a year. So sharing and exchanging of information and experience is totally absent in Bangladesh between the Academician and the professionals. The bottom line is that LIS education in South Asia is faced with many issue and challenges. LIS programmes in these countries are required to fine tuned to the changing needs of the employers. If these countries fail to respond to the market forces, the LIS programmes of these countries will certainly be tendered irrelevant. Therefore, there is an immediate need for a model curriculum based on the cutting edge course contents and ICTs. Teaching and evaluation methods must internalize the sprit of the emerging mechanism. Information literacy and knowledge management must be integrated in the LIS courses and reflected in the nomenclature.

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