Library and Information Science Education in India: International Perspectives with Special Reference to Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a succinct profile and contributions of Indian LIS education since its inception. It also attempts to bring to the fore how this profile presents its international potentiality and perspective scenario in context to developing countries.

Keywords : LIS education, developing countries, UGC, distance education, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the countries imparting library and information science (LIS) education, India would rank within five nations chronologically, in output and contribution to the development of thought content. If it was Melvil Dewey who made an auspicious beginning in the west, then much more notable contributions came from Dr Ranganathan in the east in all domains of LIS knowledge, thought and content. For LIS education and pedagogy from India in general and from Ranganathan in particular, the it has been un-matched and the world has always turned towards India for something new to emerge from and excel. India has been a pioneer in education and research in LIS, particularly among the developing nations who are looking for a just educational environment in this context.

What India can offer to the developing nations in imparting best education, training and research to the aspirants has been discussed in this paper? It gives a brief description of various aspects of LIS education in India and its implied suitability to the aspirants of educatee from the developing nations.

2. PROFILE OF LIS EDUCATION IN INDIA

2.1 Genesis and Growth

LIS education in India started in 1911, when the Baroda School was started by WA Borden due to the initiative taken by Sayaji Rao Gaikwad II, the then Maharaja of State of Baroda. Since then, India has not looked back and has been striding high in the ladder

of LIS education. Today nearly 100 Universities in India are running the LIS courses and imparting Certificate Course to MPhil and PhDs.

This apart, several universities are concurrently running Distance Education Programmes too. The details of the developments of LIS education in India are well recorded in the status report of the Curriculum Development Committee's (CDC) Report on Curriculum for LIS by the University Grants Commission (UGC)[1].

2.2 UGC Efforts

The UGC efforts in the development of LIS education are well evidenced by the three committees that were constituted to formulate model curriculum and pedagogic guidelines for the LIS courses in India. The Ranganathan reports on University and College Libraries and Library Science Education were the first landmarks in this regard. Later, report of the Kaula Committee on Curriculum Development in LIS Education was published in 1992.

This was followed with the Karisiddappa Committee report on Curriculum Development in LIS in 2002. This committee brought into focus the modular approach to curriculum design and expanded it to suit the local needs[2-4].

The impact of these efforts were first seen in the continuous development of the curriculum with changing times. Second, the UGC recognised LIS as a discipline on par with other pure and applied subjects. Third was the growth of teaching departments in various universities. And finally, it also necessitated the need for qualified personnel to teach the subject, which gave impetus to start the masters and research degrees programmes.

Thus the curriculum, developed over the years for the LIS matches with the modern and contemporary developments in the field and has been responsible for the creation of manpower to man the different types of professional responsibilities, in practice and teaching.

2.3 Role of Professional Bodies and Other Agencies

The role of professional associations in India in the promotion of the LIS education and its systematic development has also been noteworthy. The three main professional associations—the Indian Library Association (ILA), the Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC), and the Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS)—have been holding annual conferences at the national and international levels to take stock of manpower needs and supply of qualified manpower from the departments. In particular, the IATLIS has been focusing much closer on the education sector than the other two; it widened the scope of the membership to practicising librarians so that the teachers and practioners share a common platform towards the developments of education sector and the needs of the practice sector. The IATLIS with ILA and IASLIC also organised jointly a National Seminar on 'Hundred years of Library Science Education and its Future in October 1987. IATLIS and AGLIS again organised jointly a National Seminar on 'IT and its Impact on LIS Education and Library Management' in 1996[5, 6].

Two unique courses were developed by the Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC) and the Indian National Science and Documentation Centre (INSDOC) to cater to the needs of special libraries in particular. However, the inculcation of the graduates from these institutions in teaching programmes have given a new direction to the educational paradigm of LIS. While DRTC is an autonomous central institute under the Indian Statistical Institute, INSDOC is a constituent centre of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. The National Centre for Science Information is also offering a postmasters degree course with intensive application of IT to LIS.

2.4 Levels of Courses in LIS in India

In India a variety of courses in LIS are offered and as such the learners have a wide

choice. From a three months Certificate Course to two years Diploma Courses are available to create para-professionals. The Bachelors, Masters, MPhil and PhD degree programmes are also offered by most of the universities conducting LIS courses. Even at the Masters' degree level, there are two courses offering one year BLISc, and one year MLISc or a two years integrated MLISc programme. Besides these, library science is also offered as an optional subject at the three years degree programme to inculcate professional knowledge with college level itself. The UGC report of the CDC gives more details on the structure of these categories[1].

2.4 Distance Education in LIS in India

Besides the formal educational programmes in LIS, India also has a good infrastructure of distance education programmes in LIS. As many as 52 universities are offering distance education prgrammes in LIS; some of them such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) are providing this facility exclusively. IGNOU offers Bachelors, Masters, and Postmasters degrees and even is in the line to extend doctoral programmes in LIS through distance education mode. The course material and the audio-video lessons prepared by IGNOU can match to any international standards in this regard.

2.6 Curriculum Development and Research Growth

As already mentioned the curriculum of LIS has been continuously revised by the departments at least once in five years. In some cases, it is even once in three years. It takes recourse to the progress of the subject in its various dimensions. The three committees, mentioned already, have been the examples to this continuity of curriculum.

The research in LIS in India started at a very slow pace because of the lack of proper identity to the subject. First PhD in LIS in India was awarded in 1950s. The second came only after 20 years. But, today the number of PhDs in LIS far exceeds the time frame; there are 1000 estimated PhD holders in India and each one of them has been guiding several students from their respective departments. In the next five years the number of PhD holders in LIS in India would be around 5000—estimated at about five times more then today. A national meeting on Research in LIS was held in 1994 and numbers of papers on this subject were published to take stock of research output[7].

2.7 Infrastructure and Other Physical Facilities

UGC's initiative in providing adequate infrastructure to the LIS departments has enabled them to equip with IT laboratories to provide intensive training in their use. It is a matter of pride that among the developing nations India has the best suited curriculum with orientation to 'technology applications', (India has been the earliest to include a compulsory paper on library automation as early as in 1980s). The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) under UGC have provided enough impetus towards creating good infrastructure, for both libraries and teaching departments. The faculty to teach the traditional and IT related subjects is also available in good number as is evidenced by the large number of conferences, workshops and refresher courses organised by several professional bodies, and the Academic Staff Colleges. The IATLIS also organised a National Conference on the Study of the Infrastructure Facilities available in the LIS departments of the country[8]. Besides, a statistical presentation in this context has also been given in the UGC Report[1].

2.8 IT in LIS Education

After the USA, the UK and some European countries, India is one among the few countries, where information and communication technology (ICT)-oriented LIS teaching is being provided. In late 1960s and early 1970s teaching of computer application commenced in Indian library science departments.The courses run by the DRTC and INSDOC also included a paper on 'library automation'. The starting of the INFLIBNET and the Online Information

Retrieval Experiments carried out at National Aeronautical Laboratory and INSDOC gave boost to the inculcation of new technology trends. The contributions of private agencies, in particular the online and CD-ROM database search services started by Informatics (India) are responsible for the initiation of technology culture in Indian libraries and among the library science teachers. A detailed account of technology application in India libraries and library science education has been given by Kumar[9].

The National Information System in Science and Technology/Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (NISSAT/DSIR) and other research and development organisations like Defence Scientific Information and Documentation Centre (DESIDOC) and Sectoral Information Centres under NISSAT have also contributed to this process of technology application in libraries and the manpower development to man many of these libraries and information centres. Today, India with many projects on digital libraries on hand can be considered as technologically advanced in LIS education with IT applications. Many national and international conferences organised in this aspect gives a clear idea of its technological capabilities[10-13].

3. INTERNATIONALISATION OF LIS EDUCATION

The profile of LIS education development prescribed under above shows India's unique experiences in different aspects of LIS education and place it on par with developed nations in imparting LIS education to the aspirants within and outside the country. Students from Kenya, Ethiopia, Thailand and from SAARC countries: and from many African and South-East Asian regions are coming to India under the fellowship of Indian Council for Cultural Relation (ICCR) for pursuing studies in LIS (from bachelors to PhD programmes) and leading the LIS education mantle in their respective countries.

In 2005 two Indian professors of LIS were invited by the Danish Government to participate in the workshop organised by the Royal School of Library and Information Science, Copenhagen, where the participants were LIS educators from Africa, Asia and Latin America[14]. The two scholars are members of the Discussion Group formed by International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) with a special emphasis on LIS education in developing countries. There is growing awareness in the Asia-Pacific region about the training and practice of library and information professionals in the 21st century and need for a regional cooperation with the countries like India, which is affluent with vast experience of teaching, research and practice in LIS[15].

Study by Abdullahi,[16] *et al.* needs to be referred here in order to surface the appropriateness of India taking a lead-role in this context, particularly with an emphasis on developing countries. They made a theoretical survey on "the importance of international and intercultural opportunities in serving as essential components in educating and training library and information professionals." The scope of the paper is though limited to Europe and North America, but the kind of opportunities identified by them can be a good frame work for the others to set-in their goals.

Promotion of distance education is another area where internationalisation of LIS education can be promoted. India, since last 25 years, has been imparting distance education programme is LIS, particularly through IGNOU. IGNOU over the years has achieved substantial experience in this area, has created excellent course material using nation's best subject experts to write the lessons, and has also broadcasted the lessons through its national television network. Like India, many other developing countries such as Ghana have been utilising ICT for distance education programmes. Martey[17] in his paper has described the ICT scene in Ghana from 1996 to 2004. His paper emphases on the benefits that distance learners in Ghana will derive from an ICT-enhanced distance education.

The paper also makes some suggestions as how academic libraries in Ghana can assist distance learners. India with her experience can also exchange the views with others in

the developing world. The suggestions made by Subba Rao in this context are also worth mentioning[18].

4. STUDY OF ISSUES RELATING TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The broad perspectives on making LIS curriculum viable for the global issues were presented by Karisiddappa and Asundi[19]. They also deliberated on major issues like emergence of 'information and knowledge society'. The paper enlisted nine major factors that needed inclusion in the LIS curriculum. Many of them have now find place in the curriculum on LIS developed by the CDC of UGC. The curriculum has a viable balance between the traditional and technological aspects, practices, skills, and techniques. Karisiddappa[20] has succinctly stressed the need for a model curriculum for developing countries. Shiholo and Ocholla[21] in their paper have deliberated on the training needs of LIS professionals in Kenya. Their paper implies to seek international collaboration in developing a need-based curriculum. Indian expertise can be a part of this exercise to fulfill the requirements.

Wijetunge[22] stated that "Poor information system has poor curriculum development in Sri Lanka". Ocholla and Bothma[23] made some detailed study on the status, trends and challenges of library and information education and training in Eastern and Southern Africa. Similar studies have come from Mexico by Morales[24] and from Croatia by Horvat[25].

In the "comparative case study of graduate courses in library and information studies in the UK, USA, India and Iran" Mortezaie and Naghshineh[26] have highlighted the need for curricula revamping in terms of "diversity of courses offered; university independence; diversity of degrees offered; ease and flexibility of the higher education system; updated course programmes; emphasis on research; and course and curricula development". The paper also laments on "a widening chasm between LIS education in developing countries and those in developed countries".

In this context the paper by Asundi and Karisiddappa[14] has presented a detailed perspective on the developing countries needs in their paper presented at the Copenhagen workshop in Denmark.

Leif [27] has identified number of collaborative aspects, which are not successful in Europe but could be of relevant to developing nations. The issues of collaboration can be examined by the Indian LIS teachers to make concerted efforts to achieve them. Asundi and Karisiddappa[14] have also identified some areas of study relevant to developing countries. Like the Bologna Declaration—an international agreement with the help of IFLA could be arrived at with the Indian library and information science departments working towards achieving the collaborative and participative attitude with the developing country schools.

Chaudhry[28] identified "The aim to look into projects undertaken to promote collaboration between LIS education programmes in South East Asia". He suggested a plan for developing a repository of learning objects for facilitating sharing of teaching materials for improved LIS education. Faculty development was identified another important area of possible future collaboration in the region with possible involvement of international forums.

Wijetunge[29], made a descriptive survey of LIS teachers of Sri Lanka. He identified a strange reason for the dearth of faculty to teach LIS subjects in Sri Lanka. He also expressed lack of full-time teachers to teach in LIS schools resulting in a set-back to professional education in Sri Lanka. Though the paper suggests for a complete manpower survey of LIS professionals, the gap needs to be filled-up as early as possible. Until then neighbouring countries like India, which has needed expertise can help under the collaborative approach adopted by the SAARC countries.

The two sections, the internationalisation and the issues relating to developing countries, should be placed in juxtaposition and superimposed with the profile of the LIS education presented in the Sections 2. The

international forums like IFLA have endorsed this view as is evident from the formation of Discussion Group under its purview. The trends in LIS education are rather very conspicuous and the influence of technology is diversifying its approach. Hence, the countries with both traditional approach and suitability to adopt the technology will endure the durability for the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The LIS education in India has a unique profile, as it started as a voluntary vocation by many university libraries. This trend followed for at least a decade or so. An independent identity to the course was reached only in early 1970s. Despite these lacunae, it has progressed well and has attracted the world focus particularly that of the developing world. The profile of LIS education given in the paper shows the landmark achievements in its stride for recognition. Today, it has reached a stage where it is being considered as a course to be reckoned with technologically affluent programmes, and being considered on the agenda of apex bodies offering technical education. It is influenced by within and goes with concurrent progress made by India in the field of IT. In traditional subjects of LIS too, India stands different with scholarly contribution by Dr Ranganathan and his contemporaries and disciples. Dr Ranganathan's contributions are being considered in the design of computerised information retrieval systems. Eisenberg, Michael B, *et al.* [30] mentioned that an integration of traditional areas and IT developments is seen vibrantly in India as is evidenced by the PhD theses generated by the departments of LIS of Indian universities. The range of LIS subjects researched in India presents a very broad base, expressing in itself its potentialities and expertise in conventional subjects like library classification, library cataloguing, and library management and in the specialised areas like, digital libraries and open archives initiatives.

The internationalisation of LIS education is an issue being discussed at many international forums, and the role that Europe and North America played in the early genesis, was noteworthy. However, the needs of the developing countries are variable and they are looking towards viable partners to suit their social, cultural, economic and political environment. In consideration of these aspects, India can be considered as a viable partner in re-shaping LIS education in developing countries.

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