Need for National Consensus on Library and Information Science Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Library and information science education in India is nearing to celebrate centenary celebrations. However, several issues need to be resolved to meet the demands of the contemporary information society. The paper reviews the growth of LIS education in India, foresees the future trends and suggest for national consensus on some of the basic issues.

Keywords: LIS education, information society, UGC, IT-based information, ICT, LIS curriculam

1. INTRODUCTION

Library and information science education in India has played a significant role in the growth of information society through its planned efforts. However, the advent of Internet has totally changed the ethos of professional librarianship. The diversity in the information environment now demands multi-skilled candidates who can respond to the dynamic nature of information sector.

The managements today are not only looking for an academically high candidate, but also a person with good computer and communication skills who can develop and manage IT-based information delivery systems. Hence, the challenge before contemporary LIS education is to train future information managers in traditional principles as well as in information and communication technologies (ICTs). This calls for a curriculum that offers creative things along with knowledge and technical skills, which can encourage the students and enable them to cope with the emerging challenges.

An attempt has been made in the article to review the trends of LIS education in India under three important phases, genesis of LIS education, LIS education during 1949-99, and emerging trends in the new millennium in order to cover the important milestones that occurred in Indian LIS education. In this context, the emerging challenges in LIS education have also been discussed and some suggestions are made to improve future of LIS education in India.

2. GENESIS OF LIS EDUCATION

The credit of starting a formal course of library education in India goes to William Alonson Borden and Asa Don Dickenson who established training programmes at Baroda and the Punjab University in 1911 and 1915, respectively. Gradually other universities and library associations like the Madras Library Association (1929), the Bengal Library Association (1935), Madras University (1931), Andhra University (1935), Banaras Hindu University (1941), Bombay University (1944), Calcutta University (1946), and Delhi University (1947) started the library science programme.

It was Dr S.R.Ranganathan who converted the certificate course to one year postgraduate diploma course in librarianship and later introduced masters and research programmes in the Delhi University. Lazur[1] stated that "One can not but acknowledges here the single contributions of that erudite scholar and an able administrator Dr S.R.Ranganathan. He was one of those renowned librarians who contributed substantially through their theoretical investigations to the recognition of library and information science as a scientific discipline". The LIS education developed in India ahead of many developing countries, and has a strong foundation with significant contributions of stalwarts in the field.

3. LIS EDUCATION DURING 1949-1999

In the five decades following the independence, the LIS education underwent metamorphic changes, both structurally and functionally. Indian universities adopted the University Grants Commission (UGC) recommendations based on Dr S.R.Ranganathan Committee Report (1969), and the UGC Subject Panel on Report LIS (1980s) from time to time. Certificate courses were confined to associations and other organisations. Universities offered graduate, postgraduate and research programmes leading to MPhil and PhD. Besides, Documentation Research and Training Centre, Bangalore, and Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre, New Delhi, started advanced training in library science with emphasis on documentation services. The 'information' component was given a high priority from late 1970s and the nomenclature of library science was changed to library and information science as stipulated by the UGC. The trends in LIS education system during this period displayed its ability for expansion of structure and content of course. Another landmark in the annals of LIS was, starting of distance education programmes initiated by the University of Madras in 1981 followed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad in 1982 and later by a number of Schools of Correspondence Courses/Directorates of Distance Education, and many open universities. Initially, they offered graduate programmes but later extended it to postgraduate and research programmes.

A significant contribution of this period was Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) Report of UGC in 1992 under the chairmanship of Prof. P.N. Kaula. The report framed the guidelines for the departments to revamp the curricular programmes and enhance infrastructure facilities. Impressive performance of LIS education has been recorded since then with qualitative and quantitative growth. Frequently instituted curricular reforms and policy initiatives taken under the ageis of UGC have brought significant improvement in respect of various parameters of LIS education. However, there have been following striking limitations during this period:

- ✂ LIS education was being carried out in the most traditional way for half a century after independence,

- ✂ Despite radical changes in library and information system, the teaching/learning experience of LIS students has remained remarkably similar,

- ✂ There was delay in inclusion of information technologies for learning and adopting educational technologies for teaching, and

Review of past efforts reveals that most of the problems are due to uncontrolled admissions, minimal infrastructure, problems of regional language and inadequate faculty.

The uniqueness of LIS education reforms/revisions of this period lies in the facts that (i) reforms of LIS education were undertaken as part of UGC's overall higher educational reforms, (subject panels, CDC reports); (ii) the reform process occurred well after the developed and some Asian countries; and (iii) it has evolved with specific focus on developing professionals for managing the existing library and information system, i.e., to say institution-oriented education.

4. CURRENT TRENDS IN LIS EDUCATION

The 21st century is the age of globalisation and has affected all facets of academic and social life. LIS education too has became a part of this transformation and needs to blend global tendencies with the local responses. The major challenge for LIS education now is to be with the technology. Technology is becoming an integral part of education and LIS is not an exception. One of the important features at present in India is reorganisation of business, industrial and education sectors with new technologies that may find new jobs. The web/blog designers, the system administrators, net-based service providers, Internet information organisers, database developers, and process analysts may be the new possibilities for employment of young professionals. Therefore, there is a growing pressure on LIS departments to exchange value of the professional knowledge in the contemporary information society. In response to the needs of new millennium, UGC has recommended Model Curriculum 2001[3] wrapping the technology around all concepts of LIS curriculum so as to enable the student's learn and train according to the demands of information environment. The LIS departments are equipped with technologies and other infrastructure to some extent, but whether they are getting it transformed into expected levels of student outcome is a matter of debate!

More than 100 universities and institutes are offering courses in LIS at various levels[3]. There are six levels of LIS education programmes, viz., Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's, PG Diploma, Master's and Research degrees[4].

The courses are being offered under different modes and schemes, viz., regular (on campus) and distance (off campus); affiliated colleges of universities; and associations and government departments. Major contribution is by the universities that run the course as one plus one (BLISc + MLISc) or two years integrated streams. Further there is another stream, i.e., self finance, with variations in its structure as universities offer them as a part-time summer course, and are of one or two year duration. Departments are now also offering parallel courses like Masters in Information Management (University of Mysore), and PG Diploma in Digital Libraries (University of Calcutta). Specialisation courses such as one year PG Diploma Course in Health Sciences Librarianship by Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Bangalore; two years Graduate Training Programme by IIT Madras Central Library, IIIT Bangalore, etc. are also in offing. iSchools are the new entrants (ISIM, University of Mysore). The objective is to provide information professionals with competencies required by the work place and expand the opportunities.

5. STATE OF AFFAIRS

In spite of all these developments, there are several unresolved issues of LIS education. In 1985, Amitabha Chatterjee observed that proliferation of courses and numbers, degradation of degrees, lack of infrastructure, lowering of standards, effect of variations, difference in course contents, relevancy and orientation, lacunae in training and multiplicity of levels, distance education, student characteristics, lack of accreditation, etc., are some of the problems that LIS departments have encountered. In 2005, V.G. Thalawar identified lack of uniformity in programmes being offered, lack of checks and balances, inadequate finance and infrastructure, emphasis on regional language, fast changing technology and the subject, lack of trained faculty in IT-based activities, gap between teaching and practice, lack of coordination between LIS schools and libraries, increasing unemployment and under employment as the limitations or gaps in the contemporary LIS education. Arora and Mujo-Munshi[5] in 2000, Lahiri[6] in 2002 and many others have also expressed their

dissatisfaction over the situation[6] through various LIS Forums. Makako[7] in 2006, based on the findings of LIPER Project, *inter alia* observed two prevalent issues: low interest among well-educated graduates in Asia in the public library market owing to low salary and social status, and lack of understanding among employers to accept LIS graduates as knowledge workers.

5.1 Information Environment based on IT–A hype or Reality!

At the outset it appears that information environment in the country is working with the application of IT. There are ample examples like IITs, IIMs, IISc, IIITs, and some University and Corporate libraries, to support the argument. But the LIS profession in India has a lopsided growth. All libraries are not IT savvy. Not many public and academic libraries are fully automated and offering net-based services. Indian information environment is peculiar with a dual nature—well developed knowledge centres in higher education and research institutes, and under developed public and school library system. Majority of libraries are functioning with traditional print collections or as hybrid libraries with a combination of print and electronic collection. Karisiddappa[8] in 2003 also made similar observation in his analysis on LIS education.

Indeed, there can't be a mismatch between the training given to professionals and what is required by various sectors of information society. There is a requirement of focused initiative to integrate technology into the educational plan in a way that enhances teaching, learning and creativity, and to what extent the IT component should be included in the courses? Majority of libraries, where the outgoing students are getting employment, are private engineering and degree colleges and school libraries that appoint librarians just for getting AICTE/NAAC or government recognition and not to develop any knowledge centres. The IT knowledge, which students of these centres acquire can't be practiced. Further, these students are unwilling to specialise

and implement IT to a greater degree for a meager salary (Rs 2500 to Rs 5000) that they get.

A uniform information environment, where all libraries adopt and utilize IT advances is not possible. Hence, the LIS departments are bestowed with the responsibility of developing the right personnel with appropriate caliber to manage the libraries and information centres of varied scope and nature, ranging from small rural library to a well established digital library. This requires redefining and reengineering of LIS education programmes.

5.2 Proliferation of Numbers–Is the Supply Matches the Demand?

The admission criteria in LIS courses has become so liberal that the number of students coming out of the universities and institutions is in thousands while the requirement of the society is in hundreds; supply out numbering the demands. The distance education programmes have turned the universities into teaching factories and have lessened the professional standing and scholarly base of LIS departments. The general observation reveals that job opportunities for library professionals have an insignificant growth. A cursory review of advertisements in the Employment News from October 2004 to September 2006 revealed that there were only 51 announcements for LIS personnel (the figure exclude recruitment of trainees by special and corporate sector and might not have covered some advertisements of private sector which may come to few hundreds). Then why are we producing manpower in algebraic numbers? Is it to meet the demands of the information society or to increase the financial resources of distance education institutions or universities? The LIS departments have to make a thorough introspection in this regard.

5.3 Input of the System

The admission standards of the various institutes offering LIS Courses are not uniform to maintain quality. Owing to the low level

image of the profession, average social sciences graduates, who have neither language fluency and communication skills nor basic awareness of computers, opt for these courses. They do not possess any soft skills. Albeit, the students are being introduced to the philosophy, principles, methods and techniques in general with the idea that they will train themselves to suit a specific situation either through apprenticeship or on the job. But the profession expects a fully trained professional out of LIS schools. This is because academics relentlessly push the profession toward theory and abstraction, practitioners pull with equal might toward day to day relevance[9]. Then how to achieve the target of transformation of students as knowledgeable professionals and train them as digital librarians in a span of two years (18 working months) with low level input and limited infrastructure for processing!

It is a fact that majority of LIS departments are lagging behind in the provision of infrastructural facilities. Very few departments are being supported by knowledgeable teachers and the state-of-the-art IT infrastructure. Faculty is not close enough to the field to give practical instruction. Above all the courses are not attracting any special funding from the Universities, UGC or any other body. Sison's[10] observations are worth mentioning in this context: "Where are we then with regard to all these? Sad to say. Many of us are still of the traditional mold. We need to change our mindset not only to have the vision to overhaul the traditional curricula in the training of information professionals that we have been using for the past several decades. More important, we need to 'retool' and upgrade our skills, to enable us to provide such training and the services expected of us by our users.*"

6. FUTURE OF LIS EDUCATION

There is a growing pressure on LIS departments upon the use-value and exchange value of the professional knowledge in the contemporary information society. They are under pressure from various quarters to sustain with knowledge-based competition. Varaprasad[11] foresees that "Knowledge management will become an integral part of LIS education beyond the understanding of technology-centric solutions. Library curriculum would need to embrace both tacit and explicit knowledge management skills." The current trend of Librarian 2.0/Web 2.0 is a new development and LIS professionals need the ability, insight and knowledge to influence this dynamic environment.

The credibility of university education system lies in its openness and flexibility to change. Therefore, the future of LIS education programmes is bestowed with following responsibilities:

✄ Maintenance of quality education through effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness,

✄ Change in structure and governance of institutions from centralised to more decentralised and self-financing,

✄ Dealing with more technology and new knowledge assets and processes, with less facilities, and

✄ Linking up more systematically the educational supply to the profession's market value.

Reengineering of the LIS programmes would require a national consensus.

7. NATIONAL CONSENSUS FOR LIS EDUCATION IN INDIA

The LIS reforms in India especially from 1980s onwards, are largely ad hoc and unsatisfactory. The consensus at national level is essential to mange changes in LIS education effectively and for creating an emerging vision, devising innovative plans and long term architecture. Following issues require consensus at national level:

7.1 Levels of LIS Education

Present trend is to develop a full-fledged librarian out of a single course, i.e., library science, documentation and information technologies be mastered by each and every

student during the course duration[12]. Nearly all LIS schools have made attempts to join the 'IT bandwagon'. Cox[13] observed that, "Despite the impact of e-books, e-journals, and the web on our profession, library school students still need to learn about printed books—after all there is little sign that the 500 year old information revolution started by the printed word is losing its significance". Therefore, let us stop thinking that one educational degree is adequate; being professional requires continuous learning and updating. Hence, the LIS education need to be at two levels: (i) traditional graduate level with introduction to new concepts to develop manpower for traditional library system that can be offered by affiliated colleges and distance education programmes, and (ii) advanced postgraduate level courses to produce manpower suitable for advanced information environment to be offered on campus by universities. There may be parallel courses at masters level if there is adequate demand.

7.2 Core Curriculum

Biswas[12] observed that "first we have to make substantial adjustments in our agendas, especially in our core curriculum to have a truly national direction in curriculum development and its mandatory implementation". What do we mean by 'core curriculum'? For a subject to be core there must be agreement in its definition and the length and depth of its syllabus. Some may cover it in a week while others may take it for a semester to teach, that makes 'core' meaningless. Mulvaney and O'Connor[9] stated that "If we are serious about LIS being a profession, we need to develop a true core curriculum and agree on breadth and depth of subjects it should cover…"

The core curriculum should reflect the needs of LIS profession, i.e., selection, acquisition/access, organisation, consolidation and repackaging, and retrieval/dissemination of information available in print, micro or electronic multimedia formats. The curriculum for an information society has suggested framework that includes the creation, collection, communication and consolidation of information as the core areas and has identified knowledge,

skills and tools to be imparted[14]. Similar framework may be developed with orientation to recent trends. The remaining aspects can be covered as optional with ample choice to the student to select courses that suits to his caliber and pace of study. UGC can identify a university department as a 'Curriculum Development Centre' to initiate reforms[12]. Alternately, there can be a Curriculum Development Group under Indian Library Association (ILA) or Indian Association of Teachers of LIS (IATLIS) for devising curriculum reflecting future needs of the industrial and service sectors and continuous monitoring of the curricular changes.

7.3 Teaching Techniques

The quality of curriculum can only be realised when it is taught effectively. Quality teaching is most likely to happen when it is student-centered, because that's where the responsibility lies. Hence, there should be recommended set of class room practices and exercises that are conducive to enhanced creativity, training the mind for problem identification and solving keeping in view the societal needs. The current education system merely imparts bookish knowledge with little attention to actual learning and understanding. It should focus on development of problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. The student must take a leadership role in today's distributed information environment. This is only possible when the students are imparted with principles of the subject by faculty and trained in the real library environment by professionals.

Teaching/learning strategies like independent learning, field trips, problem-based learning, case studies, independent group work, web-based learning, etc., can make students active. Further the postgraduate courses should be for minimum 24 working months; 18 months of study and six months of internship.

7.4 Admission

Who are suitable for the course? Many more students with background in science, mathematics and computer science are needed[12]. Jagtar Singh and Wijethunge[15] also expressd

a similar view while stating that "LIS departments expect their students to be of a different nature, that is an extrovert personality, with entrepreneurial flair and ability to work well as a team member".

There must be a mechanism to control the proliferation of numbers and to ensure expected attitudes from entrants, particularly at the postgraduate level. The students now being taught ought to provide an expanding array of net-based information services and be responsible for the information needs of the users. If they are in limited numbers, in-depth education and training is possible. The intake should match the demands of that region and in no case should exceed 20 students. The emphasis must be on maintaining quality and high standards, rather than expansion only[16].

7.5 Accreditation

Singh[17] expressed that "To achieve academic excellence, it is of utmost importance that standards and norms of education be prescribed and adherence to them be made mandatory. Unfortunately, there is no national accreditation body for LIS education in India.

As a result, new LIS schools are opening at a fast pace following different patterns of education and without the basic minimum facilities, resulting in mass production of professionals with sub-standard education and having least or no exposure to practical librarianship."

The standards for LIS education should stipulate the levels of programmes, admissions, curriculum, infrastructure, collaboration and employability. These broad categories will provide a framework for linking performance indicators within the subject. Teachers can use these standards and profiles as guidelines for planning activities including technology-based, in which students achieve success in learning, communication, and life skills. ILA has to take a lead role as suggested by International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and develop standards for LIS curriculum. It should take the responsibility of accreditation and tighten them at implementation. To upgrade and maintain institutional quality, every department, college or institution should be strictly accredited.

7.6 Collaboration

Virtuous cycle (two way relation) or partnership between LIS education and profession is essential to achieve the targeted goal. Collaboration is required at two levels: among the LIS departments of different universities, for exchange of faculty and sharing of resources for teaching and research, and between LIS educators and practitioners for teaching and research.

8. CONCLUSION

There is no dearth of ideas and proposals about LIS education in India, but there are no constructive steps to rectify the situation from the root level. The reforms taken so far are of the superficial level. This leads to the prevalence of passive nature among faculty, students and professionals. Consequently, it is not an easy task to prepare individuals as practitioners with definable capabilities.

Hence, there is a need to develop strategies with consensus at national level that helps recombine points of strength in a synthetic framework and work to overcome the weaknesses and the flaws, both of macro-structural and micro-analytic approaches. The call is for commitment to build quality library education programmes that reaffirms the historic role of university departments. Let us adopt different strategies and focus on things we can do to reinvigorate the LIS education.

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