

Short-term Library and Information Science Training Courses in India

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ABSTRACT

Short-term courses have been the pre-cursor to the LIS education programmes. However, after the educational programmes came into being, the short-term LIS programmes stopped and not many of these were conducted during the 1960s and 1970s. With the advent of information technologies in Indian libraries in the late 1980s, the short-term courses have made a slow but steady comeback. The recent years have seen the strong resurgence of short-term LIS training courses in India with new players joining the LIS training bandwagon. However, these courses in India have not been a subject of exclusive study. The study traces the history, growth, and current status of short-term LIS courses in India.

Keywords: Short-term training, LIS education, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries have been in existence since time immemorial. One of the earliest libraries, the Royal Library of Alexandria, dates back to third century BC. According to Butler¹, although libraries existed long back, librarianship as a profession evolved very slowly and in three phases. The first was in 1850s when the librarians became aware of their scholarly responsibilities. The second was in 1870s when the librarians began to realise that a book stock becomes a library only when it is systematically arranged, conveniently stored, and completely inventoried. And the third was in 1920s when librarians extended the new concepts to their own vocational activities.

Library education in the world began in the mid-1800s². However, the foundation of LIS education in India dates back to 1911 when W.A. Borden (1853-1931), an American disciple of Melvil Dewey, for the first time started a short-term training programme in library science at Baroda under the patronage of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad II of Baroda (1862-1939)³. After that, a number of LIS schools were set up in universities, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning and

research. It is reported that programmes for professional library education developed in the Madras in the 1930s, and Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi in the 1940s and in other places during the 1960s⁴.

Today, 87 universities are offering Bachelor's and Master's programmes in LIS, 11 MPhil, and 32 doctoral degrees in India. Besides, Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bengaluru, and National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi, also offer specialised programmes in documentation and information science⁵. There are also a number of institutions that conduct diploma and certificate programmes in library science.

Before library and information science emerged as a separate discipline, grooming for librarianship involved imparting skills through trainings of short durations, apprenticeship or vocational programmes. It is reported that historically, the library profession depended solely on apprenticeship in its early years⁶. The development of LIS discipline can thus be traced to short-term trainings that later evolved into systematic education programmes leading to Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's, Master's, and other higher degrees.

A search in the *Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts* (LISTA) database (<http://www.libraryresearch.com>) did not yield any study that deals exclusively with short-term courses. Most studies include short-term courses as a part of continuing or lifelong education programmes. However, in context of this study, short-term courses have been considered as those courses that are held for a period of three days to three months and do not culminate to the award of a diploma or degree.

Short-term courses in any discipline have an important role to play as they are not only a means of continuing education but also supplement and complement to the education programmes. The paper attempts to trace the growth and the current status of short-term training courses in the field of library and information science in India.

2. SHORT-TERM TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN LIS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Although the history of short-term courses in LIS in India is not systematically documented, the role of national and international information systems and programmes cannot be overlooked in promoting training courses in library and information science. The important role played by UNESCO in promoting and strengthening LIS activities, not only India but across the world, is well known. UNESCO, in its General Information Programme (GIP), included short courses, visiting lectures, guidelines for faculty development, and evaluation of library and information science continuous education programmes⁷.

One of the earliest reports of short-term training in India pertains to erstwhile Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) [presently, National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR)]. On behalf of UNESCO, INSDOC organised three regional training programmes in documentation in 1955, 1963, and 1979 in which representatives of documentation centres of a number of Asian countries took part⁸. INSDOC's contribution to LIS in India in general, and LIS education and training in particular, is also noteworthy. Apart from conducting short-term training programmes in association with UNESCO, INSDOC, in 1964, started the two-year "Associateship in Documentation and Reprography" that included an IT-based paper, namely "Information storage and retrieval"⁹. The course was renamed as "Associateship in Information Science" in 1974 and continues to be a respected library and information science programme in India.

LISTA reveals that during 1960s to early 1980s, the short-term training programmes were not a regular

feature on the Indian LIS scene. Some courses held during the period focus on indexing, abstracting, information consolidation, and repackaging, etc. The reason for the sluggishness in the conduct of short-term courses could have been due to less demand and also perhaps for the reason that the Indian academic system was focused on establishing LIS schools and consolidating various LIS academic programmes in institutions of higher learning.

Short-term courses in LIS got the requisite impetus and began to flourish since 1986 with erstwhile NISSAT's (National Information System for Science and Technology) policy to eradicate computer illiteracy among Indian LIS professionals. It is reported that during the period 1986 to 2000, NISSAT had organised 205 short-term computer courses that included many courses on CDS/ISIS and WINISIS⁹. NISSAT provided financial assistance to various institutions to conduct short-term courses. Nevertheless, since the nineties, with or without the funding of NISAAT, institutions such as INSDOC, NASSDOC (National Social Science Documentation Centre), and library associations such as Indian Library Association (ILA), Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC), and Medical Library Association of India (MLAI) stepped up short-term training courses in LIS in India. The chief reason for this was the inroads made by computers in library and information activities in India.

3. IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The arrival of computers in India during the 1980s was the all important factor for the appearance of short-term courses in LIS. It is well known as to how computers have impacted libraries and later how information and computer technology (ICT) and Internet changed the very face of the libraries and are continuing to do so. It also impacted the education and training and triggered the growth of short-term trainings for different reasons as discussed below:

3.1 Non IT-based LIS Workforce

The LIS personnel working in libraries were no doubt knowledgeable about library and its various facets, but were not skilled to work in the new IT-enabled environment, because there were no avenues available to them to revisit the conventional educational institutions for learning the requisite IT skills. This created a need for short-term courses in the area of IT.

3.2 Lack of Infrastructure in Institutions

Although many library schools came into existence, some of these made a name for themselves, the rapid emergence of IT could not be coped by the library

schools in many ways. One of the reasons was the lack of basic computer infrastructure required for teaching IT-related courses. In many instances, even if IT-based courses were available, library schools emphasised on more theory than practicals¹⁰. Consequently, students of these institutions began to seek short-term courses for obtaining hands-on trainings.

3.3 Non-revision of Course Curriculum

Given the fact that IT is a rapidly changing subject, it is essential to update the relevant LIS course curriculum regularly. However, curriculum revision does not happen as frequently as was required and as a result the curriculum of many universities continue to be outdated at least as far as the IT applications part of the syllabi were concerned. Short-term courses thus bridged the gap that existed in the LIS curriculum.

3.4 Non-availability of Appropriate Faculty

Library schools did not have the suitable faculty to teach IT-related topics; situation continues to be so in many library schools in the country. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has in place mechanisms such as the refresher courses and programmes, to tide over the situation. The short-term courses complement the programmes of UGC.

3.5 Development of the Open and Distance Learning System

The period also saw the growth of open and distance learning (ODL) system. Many universities started BLIS and MLIS programmes in the ODL mode. It has been reported that about 20 universities are offering LIS courses through the distance education mode that will double the number of professionals being produced by the traditional programmes in the entire country put together¹¹. But, many of the education programmes in the ODL system do not have adequately supported IT infrastructure to provide training in ICT.

3.6 Short-term LIS Courses: The Present Scenario

The above reasons necessitated the need for training courses in niche areas, particularly in ICT applications in libraries for students, working LIS professionals, and the faculty. Further, lack of apprenticeship programmes or in-service training in most LIS schools in India, creates problems when the students join as professionals in different libraries and information centres¹². Elsewhere, the need for short-term training courses to meet the rising demand for IT training personnel through retraining of existing professionals have also been indicated¹³.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, many institutes started conducting courses on IT applications to library and information activities. The courses included general application of IT in libraries but some focused on courses pertaining to specific software applications, particularly CDS/ISIS. A few libraries began conducting short-term courses in areas other than IT applications such as marketing, total quality management, intellectual property management, etc.

The turn of the century witnessed widespread Internet-based applications and increased use of the client server technologies. One of the major influences has been the open source software and the concept of open access both of which have enormous implications in libraries. The development of open source software in particular has impacted not only libraries but has also created new centres of training on these software.

3.7 Emergence of Niche Training Institutions

It has been discussed in the beginning that short-term training in LIS in India was concentrated at national level organisations such as INSDOC (now NISCAIR), which had the mandate and expertise for conducting training courses. Additionally, onsite trainings for handling proprietary library management software was provided by software companies that developed the software and sold it to a library. The scenario changed completely with the advent of the open source software. Open source software, primarily because of economic reasons, is being looked upon as an alternative to the proprietary software by many libraries in India. However, one of the problems with many open source software is that it has a longer learning curve and a majority of the library and information professionals are not technically adept in installing and handling these on their own. Meanwhile, the more technically savvy LIS professionals began to experiment and implement open source software in their own libraries. Such libraries began to impart trainings and workshops on the open source software. Examples include Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode for Green Stone Digital Library (GSDL), and Developing Library Network (DELNET) for Koha. Institutions mandated to carry out training activities such as NISCAIR and DRTC also started conducting training on many open source software such as DSpace, GSDL, NewGenLib, and so on.

3.8 Private Players

With the growing number of open source software and libraries' keenness to implement these training requirements could not be fulfilled by traditional institutions alone. Private players conducting training programmes for LIS professionals in India were unheard

of in the past. However, the use of open source software in libraries created opportunities for private players to foray in the area of LIS trainings. Private organisations such as Nucsoft, Delhi and Anant Corporation, Mumbai provide training and support on open source software such as Koha and DSpace.

3.9 Pre-conference Tutorials

The proliferation of library networks and associations has resulted in a number of annual events such as conferences, workshops, seminars, etc. While these events are a platform for professional exchanges and learning, it is seen that in recent years pre-conference tutorials on ICT tools are also held regularly. Such pre-conference tutorials are usually not mandatory for all the registrants of the conference and are open to those who are interested to learn about a software at an additional fee.

3.10 Consortia/Publishers

The increasing preference of electronic resources has seen the formation of many e-resources consortia. These consortia, at their own level or through the publishers or database vendors, are also providing many training programmes particularly on handling e-resources.

4. CONCLUSION

Education is a lifelong process. Formal education takes place in the academic setting at different levels. Informal education continues throughout the life through a wide variety of channels. Short-term courses are a necessary component in the education system that fulfills the continuing education needs of the society. They also aim to train people to handle technology, tools, and learn routines specific to some institutions. Short-term training courses are important in the development of the curricula of a discipline. Since these courses mostly focus on the recent developments in the discipline, they give a direction to the curricula in the traditional formal courses. Also, these are need based, which when implemented strengthens the curricula of formal traditional courses. They also contribute to the development and refinement in the teaching-learning techniques. Short-term programmes also provide an opportunity to practicing professionals to teach further their job-related skills to others. Another advantage of these courses is that it provides a platform to the teachers in the traditional teaching and the practicing world to share the platform and devise better learning opportunities.

The importance of short-term courses to bridge the skills and knowledge gaps among library and information

professionals and as activators of lifelong learning has never been as important now as at any time in the past. If the widespread use of computers in libraries in the late 1980s caused a spurt in short-term courses, the increasing use of open source software in library activities presently are triggering the resurgence of short-term training courses in the last three to four years. It is appropriate that the present training courses in India are focusing on ICT applications, pre-dominantly on open source software.

This augurs well with the global trends, which include the creation of digital libraries and institutional repositories. Short-term training courses complement the education programmes to impart the requisite skills and knowledge on new softwares. The involvement of new institutions including private players for providing short-term training courses is a positive trend.

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