Common Problems of Library and Information Science Education in Asian Developing Countries: A Review Article

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Abstract

Education of Library and Information Science (LIS) has several problems that are caused by the changing nature of the discipline and the social, economic and cultural contexts in which LIS departments function. The aim of this article is to enumerate and discuss some of the common problems of LIS education in developing countries of Asia and suggest solutions. We show that as Asian developing countries share some of the social, economic and cultural elements, they have similar problems in LIS education. Therefore, the same solutions could be recommended such as setting up limited number of independent LIS schools, establishing or empowering accreditation agencies, flexibility in educational systems, more emphasis on research, developing in-service training, relocating the departments in new faculties, equipping the departments with new facilities, employing new and skillful staff, encouraging collaboration among faculty members and departments, diversifying courses and degrees, updating syllabi in an ongoing manner, taking advantage of IT, and creating and publishing LIS literature in native language.

Keywords: Library and Information Science, Education, Asia, Developing Countries.

Introduction

Librarians used to learn their skills mainly through work and experience. This was before the development of formal academic education in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS), which was started in 1887 when Dewey established the first library course at Columbia University (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). Since then, academic education has been a main source of evolution and development in LIS. Most of Asian countries have about half a century of experience in LIS academic education. However, their education has not been as successful and fruitful as that of developed countries. Our aim in this article is to discuss some of the common problems of Library and Information Science education in Asian developing countries. We first present a brief historical overview of LIS education in some of the developing countries in Asia and then discuss common problems and propose solutions.

Historical Overview

In *India*, W. A. Borden and A. D. Dickinson initiated the formal course of library education. Borden established a training course at the Central Library of Baroda in 1911/12 and Dickinson at Punjab University in 1915. The training school at Punjab University is considered to be the second library school known in the world, the first being the Columbia school. Gradually other universities and library associations started setting up library schools. Madras Library Association (1929) and Bengal Library Association (1935) started a certificate course. Among the universities, Madras University, under Dr. S. R. Ranganathan's leadership took over the certificate course from Madras Library Association in 1931. The course was subsequently converted into a one-year postgraduate course in 1937. University of Delhi started providing facilities for research leading to doctorate degrees in subsequent years. It was again the first to start MPhil (Master of Philosophy) courses in 1977. In addition to formal teaching courses, some universities introduced correspondence courses at various levels of education. An important development in informal education was starting a degree course by Andhra Pradesh Open University (Hyderabad) in 1985 (Dutta & Das, 2001; Sarkhel, 2006; Singh, 2003).

Pakistan, shares its history of LIS education with India, which was started at the University of Punjab with teachers such as Dickinson and his wife, Helen. This course continued up to 1947, the year of independence. The training facilities for library workers were virtually non-existent when Pakistan came into being. It was in 1956 that a new force came into play with the institution of the Post-graduate Diploma Course at the University of Karachi, later followed by the universities of Punjab (1959), Peshawar (1962), Sindh (1970), Bahawalpur (1981) and Balochistan (1983). Following the recommendations of the University Grants Commission's Curriculum Revision Committee in Library Science, the nomenclature of the program was changed to Bachelor in Library and Information Science; however, the University of Punjab did not accept this change. In 1962, Karachi University once again took the lead by starting a one-year Master's program open to Diploma holders. Until 1974, when the universities of Punjab and Sindh raised their Diploma to M.A. level, Karachi University had the only Master's program in the country. The Master's program was also started by the Universities of Peshawar (1982), Bahawalpur (1984) and Balochistan (1985). The MPhil was made available at the Universities of Sindh (1982), Karachi (1985), Peshawar (1995) and Balochistan (1995). In 1967 a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) program was instituted at Karachi University. In 1994 a Ph.D. degree was also awarded by Islamia University, Bahawalpur. At Karachi University, Library Science has also been offered as an optional subject at the B.A. level since 1982. The teaching of Library Science at higher secondary level has also been introduced by some Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. For the training of Para-professionals, the Pakistan Bibliographical Working Group and the Punjab Library Association offer short courses.

These courses are recognized by the Department of Libraries, Government of Pakistan, which had been offering its own certificate courses in Islamabad and Karachi for several years. The certificate course is also offered at the Allama Iqbal Open University along with an undergraduate program leading to a Bachelor's Degree in Library Science (Haidar, 1998; Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Mahmood, 1997).

Library education in *Thailand* was first introduced at Chulalongkorn University in 1951 under the support of the Fulbright Foundation. At the beginning, it was just a training program, conducted by five American professors who offered a certificate in Library Science. In 1955, the Department of Library Science was established at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University to offer a program for a diploma in Library Science. At present, there are more than ten universities both private and public that offer programs in Library Science at a Bachelor degree level and a Master degree level. However, it appears that library education in Thailand is moving towards offering only the Master's degree and the curriculum has been revised to include information studies (Butdisuwan & Gorman, 2002; Premsmit, 1999 & Ruksasuk, 1999).

In *Indonesia*, On October 15, 1952 the Ministry of Education and Culture established a course called Training Course for Library Staff. The course was open to library staff who previously had no formal training in librarianship (in fact before 1945 no Indonesian had any formal training in librarianship) with a Senior High School Certificate. The course name changed to Training Course for Library Officials in 1956 and in 1959 changed to Library School. The training period was extended, from formerly one and a half year to two years, later on to two and a half years and subsequently to three years. During that time the school gave only a certificate to those completing the course of study, which was a source of criticism because the certificate did nothing to advance the recipients in the ranks of the civil service. In August 1961, the school was attached to the newly founded Teachers' College University of Indonesia, hence known as Department of Library Science, Teachers' College University of Indonesia. The curriculum was extended to a three-year course. In September 1963, the department was attached to the Faculty of Letters at the University of Indonesia (Sulistyo-Basuki, 1999).

In *Iran*, the first attempt to provide LIS formal education was made in 1966 at the University of Tehran. American library advisors were invited to establish the program at the Master's level. The program was totally taught in English. Similar programs were started at Shiraz University, Iran Medical School, Ahwaz University and Alzahra University. Following the Islamic revolution, Americans left Iran. During the three decades after the revolution, LIS formal education has experienced many phenomena. The official language of the course changed from English to Persian (Farsi). The program was updated twice and currently it is being revised for the third time. New schools have been established. Many schools execute LIS program at undergraduate level. The number of

schools educating Master students has increased and Ph.D. programs have been started in a few universities.   A part-time program has also been established by the Payame Noor University. In-job or life-long training programs are executed by the Iranian Library and Information Science Association (ILISA) and some other institutions like Iranian Research Institute for Scientific Information and Documentation (IRANDOC) and the National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hayati & Fattahi, 2005; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002).

In *Kuwait*, formal Library and Information Science education began in 1977 when a two-year program was established at the Teachers' Institute at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). The program was designed to prepare high school graduates to be Assistant Librarians. In 1986, the program was upgraded to a four-year program awarding a Bachelor degree. The new Department of Library and Information Science was housed at the College of Basic Education, which replaced the Teachers' Institute. As a result of the pressing needs for Library and Information Science professionals in Kuwait, the College of Graduate Studies invited a team of American library educators to prepare a report on the establishment of a Graduate Library and Information Science program. The report, submitted in January 1989, strongly endorsed the establishment of a graduate program. Because of the Iraqi invasion, as well as a change in priorities of different administrations of the University, the plan to establish the Master's degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS) was delayed. In 1995, Kuwait University administration decided to revive the plan for establishing the MLIS program. This was done in response to the desperate need for professional librarians and information specialists to staff the academic, public, and especial libraries, as well as other information agencies in Kuwait. The program was also intended to provide opportunities for staff development and continuing education for existing library staff in Kuwait. In accordance with the practice in many accredited schools and programs in advanced countries, and in line with the consultant's recommendations for the program, the MLIS program was placed in the College of Graduate Studies (Alqudsi-Ghabra & Al-Ansari, 1998).

Common Problems

A review of existing literature on LIS education in Asian countries revealed several common problems. Here, we discuss some of the common problems and try to propose solutions.

1. Lack of independence: By independence here we mean financial independence and the permission to develop or modify curriculums. An independent university is better able to compete and keep up with the technical and scientific developments. State-run universities in Iran rely on the annual budget they receive from the government. They also have to go through a complicated bureaucratic procedure in order to change a curriculum or

develop a new program. This has made the content of many programs outdated. Under such conditions, it is not easily possible to establish new departments, laboratories and research centers, create and execute new programs, revise current programs (Tang, 1999), courses and syllabi (Amin, 2003), and register students based on quality criteria.

Proposed Solution: In some countries such as Iran, the higher education officials are aware of this problem and have taken some measures to resolve it. Recently, large universities have gained the right to develop new curriculums or modify the existing ones. There are also specialized committees in the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) that are in charge of revising the current curriculums. However, this process is slow. LIS departments should improve their links with the professional and business sectors in order to have alternative or complementary sources of funding. They could collaborate with publishing, software and some other industries.

2. Lack of Accreditation System: Accreditation is a mechanism for quality control. Monitoring activities of an organization is necessary if it is to improve. Accreditation has several benefits. A qualified department is more likely to absorb (talented) students. It also helps applicants choose the department at which they want to study. The organizations that are normally in charge of accreditation are scientific or professional societies and associations. National LIS associations have not yet been established or empowered in Asia, and therefore, accreditation of departments rarely happens in Asian developing countries (Al-Ansari, Rehman & Yousef, 2001; Amin, 2003; Dutta & Das, 2001; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Jeevan, 1999; Miwa, 2006; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Premsmit, 1999; Rehman, 2008; Sarkhel, 2006; Satija, 1999; Siddiqui, 1996; Singh, 2003). The lack of quality control results primarily in an imbalance and dissatisfaction among graduates and in the job market. Consequently, graduates lose several job positions because they simply are not qualified for those jobs. From the accreditation viewpoint, there are many causes for the association's weaknesses ranging from ethnical trends and issues to powerful personal relationships, lack of legal regulations, lack of awareness about the role of the associations and the importance of their function, etc.

Proposed Solution: To resolve this problem, the primary focus should be on the development and empowerment of LIS associations. LIS associations should establish standards for LIS departments and libraries and protect the interests of professionals. They should gradually prepare the infrastructure required for setting up an accreditation system. To achieve this goal, cultural and legal barriers should be tackled.

3. Multiplicity of Departments: In the absence of an accreditation system LIS departments experience a mushroom growth (Rehman, 2008). This is one of the characteristics of LIS education in India and Iran (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). Bangladesh suffers from the same problem (Jakaria Rahman, Khatum & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008). If we compare the population living in Canada, USA, and the UK to the population

living in some of the developing countries like Iran and India, we would be able to understand an imbalance between the growth rate of the population and the growth rate of the LIS departments in developed and developing countries. For example, the total number of the accredited departments executing LIS programs in Canada, UK, and the USA is 70 and the total number of the unaccredited departments just in Iran is more than 70. In India, different numbers have been mentioned in the literature including 106 (Dutta & Das, 2001), 107 (Amin, 2003; Satija, 1999), 120 (Sarkhel, 2006), 133 (Singh, 2003), and 141 (Jeevan, 1999). The worst result of this mushroom growth in the number of LIS departments is graduation and unemployment of a large number of students, mostly unable to tackle new information challenges (Haidar & Mahmood , 2007; Miwa, 2006; Singh, 2003).

Proposed Solution: There should be quality control and monitoring system in place in order to guarantee some basic standards for all LIS schools. Therefore, no new LIS school should be established without the approval of an accreditation agency. This would partly solve the unemployment problem and will improve the social status and self-esteem of the graduates.

4. Inflexibility in Educational Systems: Flexibility in this case means the possibility of registering on part-time basis and then switching to the full-time mode or vice versa. Such a trend is seen among practitioners. Another meaning of the flexibility is being able to switch from a Master or an MPhil to the Ph.D. course. Graduate students can usually enter directly to the Ph.D. based on their supervisor recommendation. Flexibility also means being able to register in an academic program without having its prior degree. In some cases, work experience substitutes the formal education. Interviewing with applicants and checking their qualifications substitutes the degree. Switching is one of the attributes of LIS education in developed countries (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). Such a possibility is rarely provided by LIS departments in Asia. The higher education system as a whole is not flexible and the same inflexibility is dictated to the subordinate departments. Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Karachi and the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies at the Hanoi Cultural University were exceptions in this regard. In these departments, five years of experience in a research or large library was an accepted criterion, among other criteria, for the admission in MPhil and MLIS respectively (Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Tran & Gorman, 1999).

Proposed Solution: Educational system should be flexible. Students should be able to change their study mode from full-time to part-time.

5. Mere Emphasis on Education: In Master, MPhil and Ph.D. courses doing an original research is the main requirement for awarding the certificate (Amin, 2003; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). In leading universities research is more important than teaching. For this reason, their courses are normally more effective than the courses executed in Asia. Inversely, teaching is the priority and there is little free time for research

in Asia (Al-Ansari, Rehman & Yousef, 2001; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Satija, 1999). Asian LIS departments admit a large number of students and faculty members have to allocate most of their time to teaching activities. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with research methods is another major problem (Haidar, 1998; Satija, 1999; Xiao et al., 2008). An outcome is graduates who are not able to conduct proper research.

Proposed Solution: To solve the problem, giving admission to new applicants should be controlled and limited. Furthermore, there should be an opportunity for faculty members to learn and test new research methods. Since research methods evolve constantly and new areas of research emerge, there should be continued or life-long education through which new methods and tools are introduced to graduates of the past decades.

6. Lack of Continued Education: Changes and developments come very quickly to LIS. Thus, universities offer regular and diverse continued programs in order to refresh and update the knowledge of graduates. These are presented in the form of distance learning courses, summer courses and evening or weekend programs at different levels (Mahmood & Ajmal Khan, 2007; Premsmit, 1999). The above-mentioned scenario could easily be seen in European and American universities. LIS departments in these universities currently offer some educational contents through new media such as the Web to those who are far from the place the department has been located. On the other hand, Asian LIS departments face a wide range of shortcomings including lack of qualified persons to execute courses, inability to create content, lack of appropriate medium, lack of practical knowledge, lack of applicants, etc. These are reasons of criticizing LIS distance education in Asia (Al-Ansari, Rehman & Yousef, 2001; Bhatti & Arif, 2006; Haidar, 1998; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Jeevan, 1999; Kanjilal, 1998; Mahmood, 1999; Sarkhel, 2006; Satija, 1999; Singh, 2003; Tang, 1999; Xiao et al., 2008).

Proposed Solution: Continuing education/in-service training facilities should be recognized as an essential part of manpower development programs and sufficient financial resources may be allocated for this. Shortcomings can be tackled through the following procedures:

- Evolving the national strategy for in-service training.
- Assessing the training needs of professionals.
- Collaboration between various LIS schools for producing materials and coordinating programs.
- Allocating a regular budget for staff training.
- Obtaining financial support from sponsors and donors.

7. Locating Departments in Faculties of Fine Arts and Humanities: Most of LIS departments are located in faculties of education, fine arts, humanities, psychology and social sciences (Butdisuwan & Gorman, 2002; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Tran & Gorman, 1999). No understanding about the nature of LIS as an academic discipline and its

function as a profession exist in these faculties. Departments located in theses faculties are mainly devoted to theoretical and social studies. Their educational and research activities are merely implemented using library resources and without computer laboratory, internet connection, wireless technology, programming technique, or database design. Under such conditions, pressures are put on LIS departments so that they would not be able to do their tasks in an effective manner.

Proposed Solution: LIS departments should relocate themselves in Science and Engineering Faculties. On the one hand, the main focal point of the information profession has been shifted from the sources to the information, from the format to the content; and on the other hand the main trend of the same profession has been shifted from the free and social services to the fee-based and technological ones. In this new focal point/service LIS shares with mathematics, computation, communications, and electronics. Relocating let them share ideas and programs and take advantage of technical advancements in pure and applied sciences.

8. Lack of Adequate Facilities, Resources and Buildings: The library and computer laboratory for LIS students are both a workshop to do practical assignments, learn and create new things. But, in many cases, Asian LIS departments have little facilities, resources and buildings (Dutta & Das, 2001; Haidar, 1998; Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Mahmood, 2003; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Rehman, 2008; Sarkhel, 2006; Singh, 2003; Tran & Gorman, 1999).

Proposed Solution: No LIS school should be established without having an adequately equipped library and laboratory. Otherwise, competent professionals cannot be trained. Some standards and guidelines recommend a departmental library equipped according to the academic library standards and an IT laboratory and network facilities with the ratio of 1:5 that is one computer for every five students. Access to standard software packages including Microsoft Office and a given library application should also be provided.

9. Inadequate Number of Faculty Members: Adequate staff is one of the attributes of accredited LIS departments. There is usually more than one qualified person for teaching a given course and directing a given research project. Visiting and adjunct tutors are also invited form other departments and universities. Inviting faculty members from other countries is also accepted in graduate level. This diversity helps the departments optimize courses and provide students with a better experience. In contrast, there is a scarcity of qualified faculty members in Asian developing countries. Departments could be found that still use academic librarians as lecturers on a full-time or part-time basis (Butdisuwan & Gorman, 2002; Dayyani, 2006; Dutta & Das, 2001; Haidar, 1998; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Mahmood, 2003; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Rehman, 2008; Sarkhel, 2006; Satija, 1999; Siddiqui, 1996; Singh, 2003; Sulistyo-Basuki, 1999; Tran & Gorman, 1999; Wijetunge & Wilson, 1998). Financial and legal

problems do not let Asian universities to employ more faculty members. There are also ethical issues that should be taken into consideration. Sometimes, a given type of monopolistic behavior is experienced and faculty members in a department may not be interested in acceptance of new members.

Proposed Solution: The problem of inadequacy in the number of faculty members should be solved through employing more faculty members. This problem has received some attention during the past decades. In some cases, staff went to the America, Australia, Canada, India, and the UK to do a Ph.D. Furthermore, ethical and cultural barriers should be addressed.

10. Lack of Collaboration among Faculty Members: LIS as an interdisciplinary field needs to establish strong links with interconnected fields such as mathematics, computation, communications, psychology, linguistics, philosophy, etc. In America and Europe, powerful relationships could be seen among faculty members of all disciplines. Collaboration among researchers in different universities and departments has been showed (Noruzi, 2008). Developing countries, in contrast, have another situation. There is not any scientific exchange and collaboration among faculty members in a given LIS department, among LIS departments and between LIS departments and other departments (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Satija, 1999; Tran & Gorman, 1999; Wijetunge & Wilson, 1998).

Proposed Solution: The low level of collaboration mainly roots back to cultural and ethical issues. It is solved through social and psychological programs rather than improving the technological equipment of the schools.

11. Lack of Diversity in Programs and degrees: In developed countries, there is a diverse range of courses and degrees that meet different needs of the job market. Diversity in Canada, UK and the USA is evident (Alimohammadi & Sajjadi, 2007). In contrast, Asian LIS departments suffer from lack of diversity (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002).

Proposed Solution: Educating and employing faculty members with various specialties, different abilities and various research interests and giving them the authority to create new programs and update the existing ones are solutions for creating diversity in courses and degrees offered.

12. Outdated Syllabi: There would be a perfect cycle if new technologies create the need for new skills, new skills create the need for new courses and new courses prepare skillful professional. Through such an approach, universities try to keep pace with the market requirements. This perfect cycle can be seen in the higher education system of developed countries. On the contrary, there are many Asian LIS departments that execute an outdated program through which no qualified person could be educated for the third millennium (Al-Ansari, Rehman & Yousef, 2001; Amin, 2003; Blankson-Hemans & Hibberd, 2004; Dayyani, 2006; Dong, 1997; Dutta & Das, 2001; Haidar, 1998; Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Johnson, 2008;

Kanjilal, 1998; Mahmood, 1997; Mahmood, 2002; Mahmood, 2003; Miwa, 2006; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Premsmit, 1999; Sarkhel, 2006; Satija, 1999; Tran & Gorman, 1999; Wijetunge & Wilson, 1998; Xiao et al., 2008). Relying on foreign consultancy to tackle the problem (Siddiqui, 1996) and revising the national LIS curriculum through an opinion poll among lecturers of the country (Fattahi et al., 2006) have been reported in some cases.

Proposed Solution: Executing an updated and well-designed curriculum will ensure quality education. Revised curriculum should be capable of preparing the future professionals in order to meet the challenges enforced upon them from time to time.

13. Not Taking Advantage of Advanced Technologies: LIS education is widely capable of accepting new information and communication technologies (ICTs). To meet the complex information needs of end-users, a new group of information professionals should be educated; and to educate new information professionals, new technologies should be manipulated in the process of education. This cycle is being flowed well in LIS departments of the developed countries and is a parameter of effective learning (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). There should be two prerequisites for taking advantage of advanced technologies. The first is familiarity of faculty members with new developments in technological areas. It necessitates the willingness among faculties and continued education provided to them. The second factor is equipping the departmental laboratories with the latest information and communication technologies. The situation in different Asian developing countries is not the same. Unfamiliar faculty members and unequipped departmental laboratories (Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Mahmood, 1997) block benefiting from ICTs in education. Thus, a traditional mode of education remains as the only form of executing the program (Amin, 2003; Tang, 1999).

Proposed Solution: Every change in syllabi should incorporate discussions from information and communication technologies. Interested faculty members should be employed and retrained continually.

14. Lack of Text books in national languages: In Asian developing countries, students mainly speak a language other than English. For this reason, they primarily have a problem with studying English texts. On the other hand, there may be few textbooks in the Asian languages. So, students have to rely on texts developed in the UK and USA (Dayyani, 2006; Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Mahmood, 1997; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002; Siddiqui, 1996; Tang, 1999; Tran & Gorman, 1999). Therefore, Asian LIS students have difficulties in studying and having an interpretation of the foreign text books.

Proposed Solution: Authors and publishers of native literature should be supported. Language instruction and the publication of new materials should be encouraged. Regional

clearinghouses for unpublished or hard-to-obtain literature and materials should be established, whether public or private.

Conclusion

Finally, the LIS profession is attaining the status of a full-fledged discipline increasingly. However, it has low recognition and has not been regarded at par with other well-known professions. As a result, not many talented students choose LIS as their field of study. To solve these problems setting up limited number of independent LIS schools, establishing or empowering accreditation agencies, flexibility in educational systems, more emphasis on research, developing in-service training, relocating the departments in new faculties, equipping the departments with new facilities, employing new and skillful staff, encouraging collaboration among faculty members and departments, diversifying courses and degrees, updating syllabi in an ongoing manner, taking advantage of IT, and creating and publishing LIS literature in native languages should be encouraged.

Acknowledgement

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