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QUALITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION

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[Library Science profession today is at a crossroad of diversified factors involving management of several different tasks hitherto not handled. Quality management concepts and methods have begun to penetrate in the libraries. This paper is an attempt to highlight, in a nutshell, how library schools can gear up to take up the challenge of the new millennium to prepare right type of professionals.]

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of professional education is self defined - to prepare individuals to practice a profession. Education is a complex process. It may refer to formal schooling or to the life long process of learning from experience. Education at the tertiary level aims at the all round development of the individual - mental, moral, social or cultural for adjusting oneself to different working situations. It is expected at this level that the individual learner gains knowledge, acquires skills to develop himself to find his place as a worthy member in the profession. For such type of education, a planned programme is of vital importance and it is reflected in the curriculum that is designed for this purpose. The curriculum indicates the dimensions of the teaching - learning process.

2. LIBRARY SCIENCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Formal library training in India has a history of more than eighty years behind it, while Library Science Education as such came through Universities at a slightly later stage. It is taught at different universities and training centres, such as –

1. Post matriculate certificate course
2. Post higher secondary polytechnic course
3. Post graduate Library and Information Science
4. Post BLISc - Master of Library & Information Science
5. M. Phil programme
6. Ph. D. programme
7. Associateship offered by INSDOC, New Delhi and DRTC, Bangalore

According to UNESCO report [1], there are 78 Library Science Schools in India offering BLISc course. A compilation by Verma [2] indicates that since 1957, 292 recipients have been awarded the Ph.D. degree in LIS by different Indian Universities. While detailed content analysis of LIS syllabi is not the objective of this paper, a quick, cursory glance at the same for LIS education in Indian Universities, including the open universities gives an impression that some diversity is observed in the course curricula of LIS education. There is a distinct difference between education and training and this issue was also discussed at CALIBER 97. These two often go hand in hand, simultaneously with changing social landscape. It is important to know the connection between one's career in the profession and how curriculum content can enhance career prospects.

3. ROLE OF CURRICULA IN LEARNING PROCESS

Curriculum development is a process than purely a product. It is expected to take into consideration the trends in the socio-economic front and link it with the needs of the profession. Syllabus is the product of curriculum development process. The important changes taking place in higher or tertiary level education are the changes in learning process. There is an increasing trend of adopting to combination of teaching methods and a shift from “chalk and talk” method. The traditional teaching methods are supplemented by project work, seminar, group discussions, field work, tutorials, in-service training, internal assessment etc. Study and learning habits of students are changing. The Library Science profession is demanding specialized skills from the professionals in addition to simply disseminating information. These skills have to be acquired through learning process. For example, when students are expected to give seminars based on their project work, they are disseminating the information what they have understood. It needs skill of presenting what they have grasped, justifying what they have to say and understanding human interactions. Learning and grasping abilities of students are generally checked by three means –

Writing skill - It mostly revolves around memory and retention power - whether long or short.

Doing skill - One learns best by ‘doing’ something. Some students are quick in ‘doing’, some take time.

Thinking skill - This involves interpreting the facts, ‘doing’ by trial and error and seeking solutions to complex problems and establishing links among them.

Traditional syllabi have not given much attention to the Thinking skill . One important activity in higher education institutions, more precisely in universities (where Library and Information Science is taught), is learning through research. This research may be in the form of project work, dissertation, investigative work and so on. According to Brophy[3], learning

carried out by project work and investigation is a valid research activity. Once learning is a research activity, curriculum designing and framing a syllabus has more fundamental role to play. Today, library is a part of worldwide network and the requirements of the users cannot be predicted with absolute certainty. Therefore, Library Science Education needs to be structured in such a way that the professionals develop necessary abilities and skills to withstand the pressures, while they are in learning process.

4. SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE NEW PROFESSIONALS

In the era of rapid technological changes, libraries are undergoing transformation and so also users' expectations. Skills and competencies acquired during early career stages are not likely to suffice beyond 10-15 years. The market place of libraries is partly determined by their ability to disseminate knowledge, that the market wants. Librarians deal with the information in contexts. In addition to access the information, they are expected to add value to it and create a repackaged information. Private sector today is under pressure to get ISO 9000 accreditation and certification to stand in the global competition. It will not be too long that this will penetrate to library services through ISO 9004 series which essentially are guidelines for services. Coming generation of Information Professionals will increasingly work with non-librarians. They will be having a dialogue with specialists in computing, networking, finance, marketing and so on. The services will be more customer based. They will have to acquire skills such as :

- Excellent communication skill - both oral and written with polite 'aggressiveness' to be able to justify a stand.
- Professional attitude to critical thinking for problem solving.
- Broad knowledge of networked information and deep knowledge of specific subject field, with understanding of Expert Systems.

- Knowledge of setting up Web sites for libraries, as library guides.
- Developing attitude towards “Marketing of Information”. Libraries should gradually shift from being ‘overheads’ to “revenue earners”.
- Knowledge of writing on-line publications using SGML code.
- Skill for developing multimedia packages.

The syllabus of any course has to be structured within a fixed framework. Every professional training has a life cycle and a transitory period. The quality of future professionals depends much on having an up-to-date curriculum. It needs to be so oriented that it is able to cope up with the rapidly changing needs. At the same time, it is not feasible to revise the syllabus frequently. Therefore, it should be supplemented by having short term instructional programmes, workshops, continuing education programmes - attendance to which should be made mandatory to both teachers as well as students. Sending students to other sites/locations for work for long durations is a common practice in the faculty of Home Science, Tourism, Nursing, Engineering, etc. Same practice may be thought over seriously for Library professionals. This will make learning a self motivating exercise. Brain storming sessions may be arranged to design the course, which may be done in such a way that, within the framework of syllabus, it offers opportunities to students to groom themselves to give quality services when they enter the profession.

5. QUALITY GOALS IN TRAINING FOR QUALITY SERVICES

Quality is an elusive element and highly subjective. Measuring quality is rather difficult in service function., The six sigma approach developed by Motorola is a statistical unit for measuring quality. Although it is aimed at upgradation of business rocesses with nearly zero

defect, there should not be any difficulty in applying the quality concept involved in it for giving quality services from libraries. It may be achieved partially by adopting following means :

- Making conscious efforts for improving communication skill - verbal, written or even through body language.
- Developing the skill to understand what the user needs exactly.
- Teaching critical thinking and problem solving which can be integrated throughout, for all library related activities.
- Making a plan for Computer Assisted Instructions - both for the students as well as users.
- Developing “Intelligence Learning Technology” by having self teaching guides or “do it yourself” series.
- Organising library’s collection with near zero defect. This is absolutely essential for speedy information retrieval.
- Managing library budget with no duplication and with very conscious efforts to avoid overhead expenditure.
- Avoiding a situation where handling I. T. related activities are monopolised by few individuals. Every professional in the library should be trained to give any service at any time. “Save the time of the reader” must be the motto. Also, no job in the library should be undervalued.

6. CONCLUSION

Higher education in Library and Information Science needs to address the issue of teaching students how to learn and implement new ideas, new concepts, and develop an attitude to have a desire to continue to learn throughout the working career. Technology is just not the answer for everything. Computers can store and process vast amount of information but they are not creators,

neither intuitive. Quality Management is not merely sophistication of equipments but it is managing the change which needs a change in philosophy and developing right attitude. The curricula in Library Science should provide sufficient scope for continuous learning, as well as it may be designed in such a way that every professional feels confident and comfortable over handling technology. Special efforts may be done to identify such professionals who have strong leadership qualities and have the potential of being visionaries to take the profession ahead successfully. Information Management in the new millennium will then be a rewarding experience.

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