

Lis Education in South India in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

We are living in the Information age. Information is the basic requirement for every human activity and it is important as food, air and water. Information is itself has no value, but its value lies in its communication and use. Librarianship is a people profession; a librarian's job is to connect people with the information they are seeking, whatever format that may take. In the digital age, when information is increasingly becoming available online, there is a propensity to say that libraries and librarians are redundant. This is not the case. The article assesses the status of formal library and information science (LIS) education provided in South India to meet the demand for library services in 21st century. Taking an example of four top universities LIS programs in South India (University of Madras, University of Mysore, Kerala university and Andhra University), this article makes some practical suggestions for LIS instructors to promote changes in LIS syllabus and curriculum. It is obvious from the analysis that the curricula of Andhra university (M.L.I.Sc.) is outstanding with optimum balance on the new roles of LIS professional in the merging service-oriented and user centered library environment while compared with University of Madras. The article recommends to establish a national accreditation body for LIS education to monitor the quality and standard in LIS courses; to develop e-learning packages to facilitate self learning; to outsource the teaching faculties from IT and ICT industries; to include more of the technology oriented practical components as well as scope to develop soft skill and professional ethics in the syllabus; uniformity in LIS curriculum throughout the country.

Keywords: LIS education, South India, LIS curriculum, ICT, Challenges in LIS profession, future of LIS education.

Introduction

The libraries have transformed drastically from the storehouses of books to the power houses of knowledge, since the middle of 20th century. With the advances in information and communication technologies the libraries are now changing to what may be called virtual or digital libraries. It has affected significantly the nature of delivery of library resources and services. The traditional concepts of organization, bibliographic description and dissemination of information are to be fine-tuned to the new environment by the library and information professionals. So the LIS professionals working in the environment have to face challenges. Hence it becomes important for the patrons/ clients also to develop skill in

information literacy so that they can identify, evaluate and use the relevant information effectively.¹ This article outlines the developing trends in information technology applicable to web-oriented library information resources and services and makes some practical suggestions for LIS instructors to promote changes in LIS syllabus and curriculum.

The main objectives of LIS education are to: provide training for building up leadership qualities among the LIS profession; develop knowledge on the latest techniques of information storage, transfer and retrieval; help to acquire necessary skills in handling, accessing and application of electronic resources, tools and media; and help to know the latest developments in the Information Technology (IT).²

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Previous studies to examine the challenges of LIS profession in India

In India Jestin & Parameswari (2002)³ explored the challenges for library professionals in the new millennium. It found that library professionals in India were subjected to various challenges. The introduction of computers and new technology was a challenge to all librarians. It was concluded that librarians should be ready to participate in the process of generating and distributing information and knowledge for quality of life and education for all. Librarians must unite to withstand the revolutions that will occur in the information and communication fields. Similarly, Dasgupta (2009)⁴ searched out that in India there is non-existent of norms and standards for the education of librarians. Problems for Indian librarians discovered in his study were emergence of new LIS schools, insufficient faculty strength, and lack of accreditation bodies, lack of proper library facilities, inadequate physical facilities, little attention for selection criteria, and lack of apprenticeship programs. Study suggested that the Government of India should play a leading role in promoting LIS education in India, by creating more job opportunities for LIS professionals and removing disparity in pay scales among LIS professionals.

LIS education in India

In India a major changes as regards to LIS profession is seen only in last few years. India is having a remarkable place in the world as regards to its history of highly developed civilization and culture. This is evident from the rich document collections available in variety of libraries that are scattered all over the country. Even during ancient time, big libraries were existed at the major seats of learning and during the medieval period, libraries were flourished under the royal patronage. In recent years, India is having all types of libraries, which are situated at the prominent places of learning. They include State Central libraries, Regional libraries, Oriental Manuscript libraries, and libraries attached to educational institutions, Research centers, Religious/ Cultural organizations, Learned Societies and libraries managed by private organizations. After the introduction of advanced technology besides the conventional documents, these libraries are in the process of acquiring digitized documents. These libraries use all modern IT facilities in organizing their collections and providing all types of the information services using latest technology.⁵ In India, UGC and other national level organizations

make continuous efforts to revise and update the syllabus so that products of the LIS schools of India will be found most qualitative in the market for their job prospects. Still it is a hard time for the LIS educationists in India to compete and achieve the goal. LIS education in India has undergone a long way since the introduction of one year P.G. Diploma course at University of Madras in 1937 which in fact served as a model for the development of library science education programs in the country during the pre- and post independence period until 1950s. At the Bachelor degree level, LIS courses are conducted by 87 universities/ colleges and at Master degree level by 89 universities/ colleges, while Ph.D. in LIS is offered by 52 universities. Eight universities and 12 colleges offer certificate programs and six universities and six colleges offer Diploma programs in the subject.⁶ Exploration of LIS schools offering various levels of LIS education resulted in quantitative expansion.⁷

LIS Education in South India

The Madras Library Association started certificate program in librarianship in 1931; it was later taken over by Madras University under the able and dedicated service of Prof. S.R. Ranganathan. At present 25 universities in South India offer the course as regular, on campus and through distance mode. Two colleges, Bishop Heber and A.V.M. Pushpam, have full-fledged departments and are functioning under Bharathidasan University. The revolutionary change in 1990s was the starting of two years integrated MLIS programs instead of 1+1 stream of BLIS and MLIS. University of Madras renamed the course as M.Sc. in Library and Information Science⁸ and Annamalai University offering five-years integrated course (MLISc.)⁹, this has facilitated the departments to get more grants under UGC/ SAP.

Challenges and Issues of LIS education in 21st century

New tools of information technology have absolutely changed the role & responsibilities of librarians. A number of studies have been conducted to explore the problems faced by librarians. Problems faced by librarians in new digital era are:^{10,11}

- Lack of uniformity in curriculum
- Lack of admission policy and evaluation
- Lack of internship or hands on practice during study period

- Lack of well-equipped computer labs or sufficient numbers of computers for students
- Lack of high quality teaching staff
- Lack of permanent faculty for distant programs
- Lack of global perspective and lack of library visits

LIS curriculum

LIS curriculum should be a combination of traditional and ICT papers. Curriculum is the core of the reform. Most of the library schools and departments have revised or in the process of re-designing their curricula. In their curricula, courses relating to traditional library science with names such as "History of books" and "Libraries" disappeared. Instead, many computer-related courses were added. Different types of traditional and ICT papers taught at masters' level program.

Methodology

The present study covers a sample of 4 universities of South India out of more than 21 universities that offer LIS education in master's level recognized by the University Grant Commission (UGC), a statutory body established for maintaining standards in higher education in

India. The sample tried to represent each state of South India. The details of these universities are provided in table 1.

Findings

From table 1, we can observe that the course content of sample universities is not uniform. Only Andhra University and University of Madras have the internship as a compulsory paper with credit points. It is obvious from the analysis that the curricula of Andhra university (M.L.I.Sc.) is outstanding with optimum balance on the new roles of LIS professional in the merging service-oriented and user centered library environment while compared with other sample Universities in South India. Provision of quality education depends greatly on both, quality of teachers and their quantity available to impart knowledge and professional skills to the students. To know how far the universities of South India have achieved this objective, we have to look at the faculty status in the sample Universities and the data presents a very depressing picture. To teach BLIS, MLIS and M. Phil courses the sample universities have only 3-6 permanent staff members. Andhra University and University of Mysore's faculty position is somewhat better while comparing with other Universities.

Name of the university	Year of establishment	URL	Unique courses in Curriculum of MLIS	Total number of faculties
University of Madras	1931	http://www.unom.ac.in	1- Informetrics 2- Internship 3- Content Management 4- Web Technology	4
Andhra University	1935	http://www.andhrauniversity.info	1. ICT (Theory and Practical) 2. Comprehensive Paper (UGC NET model) 3. Internship	6
Kerala University	1961	http://www.keralauniversity.ac.in	1. It application in LIS 2. Technical communication 3. Bibliographic organization and electronic sources	3
University of Mysore	1965	http://www.uni.mysore.ac.in	1. Personality development and communication skills 2. E-publishing 3. Digital information management 4. Web 2.0	6

Table 1. Sample Universities offering LIS education in Masters Level in South India^{15, 16, 17, 18}

Suggestions

- It was suggested that admission test should be conducted before admission in LIS education.
- Attendance should be made compulsory and there should be uniformity in syllabus throughout the country
- Practical hours should be increased, for the purpose of imparting practical training, there should be complete infrastructure.
- The LIS students may have training/ internship in libraries, which should have IT environment for gaining practical experience.
- Availability of high caliber staff members in enough quantity should be ensured. And more orientation courses and refresher courses should be conducted for the LIS professionals and teachers.
- Developing e-learning packages for LIS courses is a viable alternate that provide an opportunity to receive expert lectures and facilitate self-learning.
- The concept of outsourced teaching patterns from the specialist of IT and ICT industries would give better knowledge.
- Quality of LIS education programs should be monitored by a unique accreditation or certification body.

Conclusion

Libraries are repositories of knowledge and information and are indispensable in the information age. With the merging of information technology with library science, the nature of libraries and the scope of their services have radically changed. Next generation LIS professionals will survive only in case, when they can able to provide the complex amount of information services to the users and accept the challenges with positive spirit.¹⁹ However, it is found from this study that LIS departments of many universities are not having uniform syllabus and not receiving the needed support and challenged with severe staff shortage, inadequate infrastructure and building problems. Thus it is right time now to seek support from financing and regulatory authorities like UGC, NKC, State and Central Government as well as from professional associations to look into the matter. We must train our students to be critical thinkers and independent learners.

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