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INDUSTRIAL TRAINING FOR LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE STUDENTS : A MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Library profession is specialized and technical in nature, and so industrial training for the library science students must have both the elements of theory and practical skills incorporated. This is becoming more pertinent with the frequent debate lately as to the relevance of libraries in the wake of emerging web technologies. We are at a crossroad in time, when even ALA seems to have difficulty defining librarianship adequately. In Malaysia, four public universities run this program, two for undergraduates and two for postgraduate programs. The industrial training is partly based on the internship model where students undergo training from one to three months. This paper will present students' comments as well trainers' feedback of a training program for LIS students in a public university in Malaysia. A few challenges such as unsynchronized training schedules between school and industry, and varying library systems are identified which calls for more collaborative efforts between library schools and industrial trainers.

Keywords: LIS program; Library profession, Library training, Library practicum, Library internship, Evaluation of training

INTRODUCTION

Library schools were established in an age when librarians were preoccupied with house-keeping collections and so library training was primarily in the areas of cataloguing and classification (Cherry, Duff, Singh, & Freund, 2011). Libraries and information services now are undergoing major transformation mainly due to the tremendous IT changes occurring globally. It is essential that Library and Information Science (LIS) students are given the rightful opportunities to gain experience and employability skills since industrial training

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or practicum can be an opportunity for industries to evaluate trainees as prospective employees.

It must be remembered that LIS students also work in other sectors such as education, information technology, medical/pharmacy research, government agencies/institutes (Marshall, Solomon, & Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). They have to be multiskilled to increase their employability. Library directors in Singapore responded to a survey regarding important competencies needed by librarians in the next 5 to 10 years (Khoo, 2005) by stating that besides the traditional librarianship skills of cataloguing, acquisitions and reference skills, future librarians should have value added skills such as research skills, soft skills, IT skills, subject knowledge and the appropriate attitudes, values and personal traits. Flexibility and willingness to handle a wide range of tasks, and ability to handle change, continual learning and entrepreneurial attitude are given importance. In countries like Singapore, industrial training is well structured and information about the training is made known over the websites. Countries like Nigeria have made industrial training a core academic requirement which carries four credit units (Ugwuanyi & Ezema, 2010). In Malaysia, industrial training is also compulsory for undergraduates (Mohd Ridzuan, 2006). The LIS curriculum in India has adopted a 60:40 approach since the year 2000 for practical and theoretical sessions respectively (Jain, Kaur, & Babbar, 2007). Efforts to integrate seminars, tutorials, field tours into the curriculum have been in place in addition to revise the syllabus to incorporate developments in IT and changes in the modes of information access.

Students too, have a say in their industrial training programs. In the report based on a 4-year survey of students enrolled in Management of Information Science Program (Cherry, Duff, Singh, & Freund, 2011), students perceive theoretical components as essential, while some students did not see the value of theoretical components and feel there is an imbalance between theory and practice, especially when students have little or no previous library experience. In a general survey among practicum students in Malaysia (Mohd Ridzuan, 2006), students express dissatisfaction with the level of collaboration between the university/faculty and the industry. They expressed a desire to be given the right kind of training which can only be achieved if the industry is given sufficient guidelines by the university/faculty.

This paper discusses the industrial training program at a public university in Malaysia. Students' comments and trainers' feedback during the LIS practicum are examined to identify gaps and challenges. The aim is to facilitate continual improvement and perhaps also for more collaborative efforts between library schools and industrial trainers.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

There are ten basic models of industrial training (Budgen & Gamroth, 2008). They are: Faculty-supervised practicum, Preceptorship, Education Unit, Joint Appointment, Secondment, Affiliated position, Internship, Co-operative education, Work-study and Student employment. It is important that industrial training for LIS students follow closely a model to ensure consistency wherever the training is. The industrial training practiced in Malaysia for the LIS students resembles closely the Internship model. In this model, the faculty contact with students during the training is pertinent. Contact can be via seminars, case presentations and project papers.

Identifying critical job tasks for an industrial training program is also an important aspect. Burkhat (1995) describes a four-step process for identifying critical job tasks: identify experts; facilitate meeting with faculty and host; together identify and select two or three critical job tasks; and document the decisions. Burkhat defines job tasks as critical if it deals with performance or training problems such as quality concerns and rate of errors and rework. Tasks which are potential risks for quality concerns, rate of errors which require rework and safety issues should not be used for training. Low risk tasks are where students can be team members.

Collaborative projects (Phelan, McEwan, & Pateman, 1996) are an upcoming phenomenon where students and host institutions can embark on collaborative research projects. The research theme can be decided by the host only or together with the students. Phelan's paper describes case studies where inexperienced student teachers and experienced teachers worked out research projects successfully. There are so much of untapped resources and unanalyzed statistics in libraries and such collaborative research projects between students and libraries can benefit both. The industrial training can prepare students for a valuable research experience (Berg, Hoffman, & Dawson, 2009). Berg strongly envisages introducing research to trainee students which will provide them with first-hand insight into the role of academic librarian-as-researcher. It is also timely because the pressure to publish is prevalent in almost all universities. Librarians should carry out research and publish so that evidence-based librarianship can be adopted. It would also serve librarians to gain recognition at par with faculty members. In this way, the library profession would be on its way to higher levels of professionalism.

Students learn the core processes of librarianship in classroom. If practical training is carried out simultaneously together with the lecture, learning could be more lifelong and permanent. It is reported that supervisory responsibility is essential throughout the project experience (Shoenfelt, 2002). To ensure training projects are successful, Shoenfelt devised a checklist consisting of six categories:

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Host organization characteristics, Project characteristics, Student responsibilities & outcomes, Red Flags, Sources for host organization, and Pay & compensation. One of the points highlighted is that the training module should be within the skill level abilities of the students. The training should not be too simple nor underutilize students' skills. Convergent efforts of the library school and the library to supervise and identify the strengths and weakness of the students can facilitate improvement in the quality of students produced. SIWES (Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme) in Nigeria, calls for mandatory collaboration between educators and practitioners to ensure a curriculum that satisfies the job markets (Ugwuanyi & Ezema, 2010).

In a survey carried out among engineering students in Malaysia (Mohd Ridzuan, 2006), the least favorable statements were related to collaboration stating that the University/Faculty provides insufficient guidelines for the company to supervise the students and the contact between the University/Faculty and the company pertaining to the student on attachment is insufficient. The low mean score for the university/faculty and industry collaboration reflect the dire need for collaboration between the industry and the university/faculty. Although the above study was carried out among engineering students, the findings can be synthesized to the library and information science education students.

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING IN MALAYSIA

There are currently two government funded universities in the country amongst 22 other universities which offers the undergraduate degree program in LIS. The first School of Library Science was established back in 1968. The aim was to train personnel to manage a library by providing in-depth knowledge of traditional library practices (Abdullah & Sani, 2007). Two other universities provide the Masters in Library and Information Science program.

Table 1: Practical Training Conducted In A Public University, 2008-2014

Month/Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
January	√	√	√				
February	√		√				√
March			√				√
April		√					√
May	√	√		√			√
June	√	√		√			√
July	√	√		√	√		
August					√		
September					√	√	
October						√	
November		√				√	
December	√	√	√				

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The training program can be from one to three months. Request from the library school for industrial training is during the final semester of the degree program. Table 1 show the training conducted during the different months for years 2008 until 2014 at a public university in Malaysia. The number of students trained formally during the seven years was a total of 43 students. Besides formal training, there are also requests for specific process areas. It is very informal and requests can come directly from the students and not the faculty or school.

There is no special section for training in this university and all the divisions involved in the core processes and functions of the library are involved. So, when requests are received from the library schools, a reply in affirmative is given with modifications in date if necessary. The training schedule program is prepared as shown in Table 2. The division heads are given a copy of the training program for their own preparation including identifying staff involved in training, the scope of training by individual staff, and place in the division for the trainees to work. Staff includes both professional and support group. This is necessary because the scope and contents of the training are quite didactic in nature.

Students are exposed to many functions and processes, some of which might not have been included in their course program. The emphasis is on the core processes such as acquisitions, cataloguing, indexing, and circulation. They are indirectly introduced to office politics, implement what they have studied in the classroom and also develop interpersonal and team skills. The library school's objective is to give the students an opportunity to apply the theories learnt during their course. It is also to increase the students' knowledge, competency, comprehension and skills as well as to gain 'working' experience in the field of library and information science. The faculty hopes that students will be exposed to the real life scenario, coming to work on time, adhere to office hours and to be supervised by people with varying characters. To learn all these within two to three months can be a challenge for some students.

Table 2: Training Schedule Of Trainees

Division	Work Process	Time Frame
Acquisitions	Policy, Selection, Ordering, Receiving, Claims, Invoicing, Payment, Gifts & Exchange, Serials Management – Updating holdings, Renewals, Binding	2 weeks
Cataloguing	Cataloguing Rules, Subject Classification, Authority Control, Using library system to	2 weeks

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	catalogue	
Information Skills	Undergraduate Program, Postgraduate/Academic Program	2 days
Information System	Computerization / Network, Hardware / Software Requirements	1 day
Client Services	Membership, Loans, Renewals, Reservation, Fines, Document Delivery, Inter Library Loan, Stacks Management, Reference Desk	2 weeks
Conservation/ Preservation	Role and Functions	1 day
Local Collection	Role and Functions, Indexing, Special Collections Management	1 week
Law Library	Role and Functions, Amendments	1 day
Medical Library	Role and Functions, Services	1 day
Islamic Studies Library	Role and Functions, Services	1 day
Administration	Discussion, Quality Assurance	1 day

Students' comments

A simple survey form is given to the students when they have completed the practicum. It can be summarized that students expect to be treated kindly and taught patiently which is typical of any young adult learner. They are immensely grateful for the training given and the time allocated for them. They only have words of praises. During the discussion on the final day, it is realized that their confidence level seems moderately high as they have seen the complete scenario of how a working life would be. Students however do express disappointment when they are not trained in all the divisions. They express interest in being trained in areas normally considered more suitable for library assistants such as binding and preservation and sitting at the loans counter. This also goes to show the students level of excitation in trying to learn as much as possible.

Trainers' feedback

The trainers are given the evaluation form which adheres strictly to the form given by the faculty. It is evaluated on a Likert scale with 1 -2 Very Weak, 3-4 Weak, 5-6 Average, 7-8 High and 9-10 Very High. The evaluation is on: Knowledge and understanding of the areas trained; Ability to analyze and interpret; Willingness to receive advise; Sincerity and dedicated; Reactive to give opinion and ask questions; and Future potential. Most of the time, librarians allocate a very general opinion and do not feel very committed to evaluate students' personality and responsibilities. Each division head fills up the forms based more on observation than any evidence based. Although some of the work

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processes are facilitated by the support/technical staff, the evaluation is not done by them. The forms are then submitted to the Senior Manager who only spends about two hours with the students summing up the industrial training program. The senior manager then comes up with an average scale from all the forms submitted by the heads. On the whole, this type of evaluation system does not reflect accurately the performance and ability of the trainees. To give them a low scale would be unfair and to give them a high scale would be inaccurate. Hence, the scale is always a safe one from 6 to 8.

The trainers are the professional staff, technical staff and senior managers. The general consensus among them is that too much time in a year is allocated for industrial training. Trainees are seen as too inexperienced to help out division work independently. For example, in the cataloguing division, whatever books catalogued will have to be checked and mistakes corrected. This is considered as additional task since normally the occurrence of mistakes by the cataloguing officers are minimal and so time dispensed correcting the mistakes are negligent. Moreover, since the trainees' subject knowledge is not really commendable, it takes an unusually longer time for them to complete cataloguing a book.

CHALLENGES

Although students normally feel they have learnt a lot, how much will be applicable when they start their new job is questionable since no follow up studies have been carried out. Student learning needs may also not be the same as the needs of the host organization. Some of the challenges faced by the library include time factor where most times the training schedule of the library school and the library are not synchronized. The other challenge faced is the differing classification and library system amongst libraries.

Time Factor

The practicum is usually carried out in the months of December/February and May/July. During the study week, students use the library more for space and loans, while the number of users who frequent the library during examination week and vacation is insignificant. Trainees posted to do counter and reference desk duties during the vacation, receive enquiries or loans which are not reflective of the host organization work load. Similarly, information literacy classes for the undergraduates are also not carried out during this period and classes for the postgraduates too are reduced greatly. The bulk of books received for cataloguing is usually in the middle of the year and during this time, cataloguers are busy. This can mean that any form of industrial training during this time is given little quality time and attention deeming the training process ineffective.

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In the early and late months of any year, the rate of receiving books ordered is minimal or even null. Funds come in only late January and orders are made beginning February. New orders for books come to a near standstill in the later part of the year beginning October. The emphasis is more on claims of books not received and cancellation of orders. When trainees come in late in the year and training runs over into the early months of the following year, they are not exposed to the full process of acquisitions. Library staff are unable to include them in the process of proper acquisition.

Library Tools

There are public and state libraries which use the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme unlike the university libraries which prefer the Library of Congress Scheme. The Medical, Law and Special libraries have their own classification scheme. Does in-depth knowledge of knowing how to use the Library of Congress Subject Headings be useful to the student who goes to work in the public library or special institution libraries? The same goes for teaching the techniques of indexing and using metadata.

The introduction of ICT brought many changes to the library and information scientists' nature of work. There is now little need for huge subject heading tools nor browse through layers of card catalogues or patron records. ICT tools for acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation and indexing are many and can vary with organizations. The use of online tools and library systems during training can be completely forgotten if students get employed in organizations using other kinds of tools and systems. Ugwuanyi (2010) emphasizes that young librarians should learn to be managers and organizers of digital content and this requires new skills and roles. So now, the question is for trainer librarians to decide if emphasis should be on context, contents or some other new skills.

CONCLUSION

The impact of training and the transfer of training to the workplace by the students trained are two important elements which are beyond the scope of the trainer library to evaluate. This is a huge limitation since the evaluation of training is carried out in isolation by library and library school. Evaluation seems more subjective rather than follow basic requirements of an evaluating system. The quality of training, as such, can be at stake especially when librarians are busy pursuing their daily responsibilities and trying to achieve their respective key performance indicators for the year. It is also difficult to quantify learning outcomes and transfer of knowledge especially when the Likert scale reading by each division is summarized to give the mean score. Pineda (2010) suggests several strategies for an effective training program including; compare evaluation results with a well-defined, observable and measurable objective, evaluation plan to be feasible and realistic, design a simple evaluation plan

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agreed upon by both the faculty and host institution, and do not evaluate everything.

The Nanyang Technological University Library of Singapore, a neighboring country of Malaysia, is known for its professional internship program. It is a one month training program for middle and junior library managers. In addition to sharing the library's strategies and directions, the training also emphasizes on staffing, library building and facility planning, promotional services for users, quality management, budget, network systems, copyright issues, technical issues and scholarly communication. It is an overall helicopter viewpoint of the library roles, functions and management. A similar one for student trainees in Malaysia would better equip them to face the workplace which comprises of many types of libraries such as academic, public, state, school, college, special and personal collections. More collaborative efforts between library schools and industrial trainers to establish in-house training programs and encompass the training program in the curriculum rather than in isolation, are ways to improve the practicum training program for LIS students.

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