

Common Issues of Library and Information Science Education

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Abstract

Education of Library and Information Science has several issues that are produced by the changing nature of the discipline and the social, economic and cultural contexts in which LIS departments function. The goal of this article is to discuss some of the common issues of LIS education in developing countries. We show that as Asian developing countries share some of the social, economic and cultural elements, they have similar issues in LIS education. Therefore, the same results could be recommended such as setting up restricted number of independent LIS schools, establishing accreditation agencies, flexibility in educational systems, more stress on research, developing in-service training, relocating the departments in new faculties, equipping the departments with new facilities, employing new and skillful staff, encouraging combination 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 and competencies primarily 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 prime 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 beneficial as that of developed countries. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the common problems of Library and Information Science education in Asian developing countries.

Common Issues

An analysis of existing literature on LIS education in Asian countries display several common issues. Here, we discuss some of the common issues and try to propose solutions.

1. **Deficiency of independence:** By independence here we mean financial independence and the permission to develop or alter curriculums. An independent university is better able to challenge 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 administrative 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, courses and syllabi and register students based on quality basis.

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 moderate. LIS departments should enhance their links with the professional and business sectors in order to have complementary sources of finance. They could collaborate with publishing, software and some other industries.

2. **Deficiency of Accreditation System:** Accreditation is a mechanism for quality control. Observing activities of an organization is important if it is to be modified. Accreditation has several benefits. A qualified department is more likely to occupy students. It also helps applicants to select the department at which they want to study. The organizations that are normally in charge of accreditation are scientific or professional societies and associations. The deficiency of quality

control mainly result 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 solve this issue, the main 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 constantly prepare the infrastructure needed for setting up an accreditation system. To achieve this goal, cultural and legal barriers should be tackled.

3. Abundance of Departments: This is one of the characteristics of LIS education in India and Iran (Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). Bangladesh suffers from the same problem (Jakaria Rahman, Khatun & 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. 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 handle new information challenges (Haidar & Mahmood, 2007; Miwa, 2006; Singh, 2003).

Proposed Solution: There should be quality control and observing 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 partially solve the unemployment problem and will improve the social status and self respect of the graduates.

4. Inflexibility in Educational Systems: Flexibility in this case means the chances 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 replaces the formal education. Interviewing with applicants and examining their qualifications. Switching is one of the characteristic 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 adjustable and the same inflexibility is prescribed to the supporting departments.

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

5. Less importance to Education: In Master, MPhil and Ph.D. courses doing an original research is the prime need for awarding the certificate (Amin, 2003; Mortezaie & Naghshineh, 2002). In leading universities research is more essential than teaching. For this cause, their courses are normally more effective than the courses executed in Asia. Inversely, teaching is the prime concern 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 allot most of their time to teaching activities. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with research methods is another major problem (Haidar, 1998; Satija, 1999; Xiao et al., 2008). As a result, graduates 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 a convenience for faculty members to learn and test new research methods. Since research methods evolve continuously 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. Shortage 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 inadequate facilities, resources and buildings.

Proposed Solution: No LIS school should be established without having an adequately equipped library and laboratory infrastructure. Otherwise, efficient 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.

7. Shortage of Collaboration among Faculty Members: LIS as an integrative field requires to establish strong links with interconnected fields such as mathematics, computation, communications, psychology, linguistics, philosophy, etc. Developing countries, in comparison 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.

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

8. Shortage of Diversity in Programs and degrees: In developed countries, there is a wide range of courses and degrees that meet different requirements of the job market. Diversity in Canada, UK and the USA is evident. In contrast, Asian LIS departments suffer from shortage of diversity.

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

Conclusion

Finally, the LIS profession is achieving the status of a full-fledged discipline progressively. However, it has low recognition and has not been regarded as equal with other well-known professions. As a result, not many talented students choose LIS as their field of study. To solve these issues 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 syllabus in an ongoing manner, taking advantage of IT, and creating and publishing LIS literature in native languages should be motivated.

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