

LIS Education in India: Challenges for Students and Professionals in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The paper deals with the Library and Information Science (LIS) education and LIS professionals in India. Currently both the traditional libraries and the digital libraries coexist in India. LIS education in India has not become receptive to the new emerging situation. The library schools have failed to develop the required knowledge and skills relating to the use of information technology among students. As a result, the graduates from the LIS departments have little competitive potential in the information market. The paper discusses the challenges in LIS education in the Indian context. It deals with the preparing LIS graduates for leadership and management roles to support national and economic development in India, as well as the collaboration and resource sharing among LIS schools. It also discusses the recent emphasis given on e-learning in LIS education in India, the impact of LIS education on the work and career of graduates, the job market for LIS professionals, competencies needed and continuing professional development of LIS professionals.

Keywords: Library and Information Science (LIS) education; Library Schools; Library professionals; Information professionals; ICT in libraries

1. Introduction

India has one of the largest educational systems in the world. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of Independence. At present there are 369 Universities comprising 222 State Universities, 20 Central Universities, 109 Deemed Universities, 5 Institutions established under States legislations and 13 Institutes of national importance established by Central Legislation. Four new Central University Acts are in the process of being brought in to force. In addition, there are 18,064 colleges including 1902 women's colleges. At the beginning of the academic year 2006-07, the total number of students enrolled in the universities and colleges was reported to be 110.28 lakhs; 14.27 lakhs (12.94%) in University Departments and 96.01 lakhs (87.06%) in affiliated colleges (Annual Report, Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006-2007). In spite of these facilities higher education in India is not accessible to more than six percent of the population. To meet the growing demand for higher education, the number of distance education programmes are growing up in India. The growth and expansion of distance education programmes have generated considerable interest in student support services in general, and library and information services in particular. LIS education in India is currently passing through a turning point and has become a fast developing subject with a multidisciplinary approach. Today LIS education not only includes the library specific subject but it also has been extended to subjects like computer application, statistics, information science, management studies and operation research. With the changing scenario modern librarianship has become a profession with a diversity of opportunities and challenges for LIS students and professionals.

2. LIS Education

The first training course in Library Science in India was established at the Central Library, Baroda in 1911/12 by W. A. Borden and at Punjab University in 1915 by A. D. Dickinson. Gradually other universities and library associations started setting up library schools. Madras Library Association and Bengal Library Association started certificate courses in 1929 and 1935 respectively. Postgraduate courses also started in other universities subsequently, such as Andhra University (1935), Banaras Hindu University (1941) and University of Delhi (1947). The University of Delhi started providing facilities for research leading to doctorate degrees. It was the first institution to start the M.Phil courses in 1977.

In addition to formal teaching courses, many universities have introduced correspondence courses at various levels of education. This provides facilities to library personnel working at the lower level to improve their qualifications and update their limited knowledge and skills and also to those who could not get admission to formal courses earlier. In India, Library Science has almost been recognised as an established discipline now at par with other social sciences courses in the university education system.

In spite of this, LIS education is currently facing a turning point. Various factors have contributed to bring about the change from the conventional to an automated library operation. Today only computerised libraries can participate in networking at the national and international levels. Most of the computerised libraries suffer from paucity of competent personnel at top and middle level managerial positions.

Presently in India, Library and Information Science (LIS) education is imparted through more than 118 universities and institutions. A total of 105 universities provide Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) courses, 78 universities provide the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) courses, 21 are offering two-year integrated courses, 16 universities provide M.Phil in Library and Information Science, 46 universities provide Ph.D in Library and Information Science and 2 Universities provide D.Litt Degree. Besides this, the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) which was earlier known as the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), New Delhi, and Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore, provide Associateship courses in Information Science, which are equivalent to the MLIS degree. Presently the following LIS courses are available in India:

- Certificate course in Library and Information Science (C.Lib.Sc)
- Diploma in Library and Information Science
- B.Lib.Sc. /BLIS (Bachelor Degree in Library and Information Science)
- M.Lib.Sc. /MLIS (Master Degree in Library and Information Science)
- PGDLAN (Post Graduate Diploma in Library Automation and Networking)
- M.Phil (Master of Philosophy) in Library and Information Science
 - Ph.D (Doctor of Philosophy) in Library and Information Science
 - D.Litt in Library and Information Science

3. LIS Curriculum

Until the year 2000, most of the library schools in India have adopted the curriculum recommendation of the Report of University Grants Commission Review Committee 1965 (Chairman: Dr S R Ranganathan). In 2001, a Committee was appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC), Government of India under the Chairmanship of Prof. C R Karisiddappa. This committee included experts, practitioners, teachers and scientists who made an outstanding effort in designing the National Curriculum for LIS Education. The committee, while keeping a practical and feasible approach, framed a modular curriculum keeping in view the contemporary developments in the job market in India suiting the different levels of LIS education. The special features of UGC model curriculum has clearly stated the learning objectives for each module, unitized syllabi, special instructions to emphasize the theoretical and practical aspects, and it also indicates the implied concepts of information literacy in LIS curriculum. The Committee also suggested a 60:40 approach for practical and theoretical sessions respectively. The practical sessions include hands-on experience, assignments, seminar presentation and demonstrations by LIS students during the course of study (UGC Model Curriculum: Library and Information Science 2001 (Chairman: C R Karisiddappa)).

With the growth of information technology, LIS Schools have understood the need of periodic examination and analysis leading to necessary changes and improvements in curriculum for the interpolation of new and fast developing areas of information technology and computer science. The objective for training of LIS professionals is to promote library, to educate, to articulate and provide for the need of the clientele to increase productivity and economy.

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. Examples of some of the topics included are:

- a) An Introduction to Computers;
- b) Programming Design;
- c) Database Management;
- d) Computerized Information Networks;
- e) Design and Analysis of Computer Application Systems; and
- f) Computerized Information Retrieval.

4. Required Skills for LIS Professionals

In the Indian context, the scope of the subjects taught varies from university to university and the students who come out of these universities with degrees mostly fail to perform in a technical or a research library. The electronic environment of the 21st century demands a range of skills from library and information science (LIS) professionals, which include technical skills, IT skills and managerial skills.

Library users are turning towards the LIS Professionals for help and advice on search techniques, database development, quality of online databases, and choice of databases that are available. As a result, LIS professionals need organized training programs, which can be in the form of workshops, conferences, seminars, symposia, and so forth.

5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Libraries

LIS professionals are at present at the crossroads. Information professionals have started facing the challenges, which are accompanied with the new information resources. The librarians, who are using computers and those who are not using computers but intend to use computers, both require rigorous training on new use of the information technology. The libraries have started using library automation for perform their functions. Computers are now being extensively used in many of the libraries for automating a number of library operations. Automation activities in special, research, university and academic libraries have been increased. Most LIS professionals are beginning to use e-mails, CD-ROMs, LAN, and Machine Readable Catalogue for resource sharing. But in the colleges, schools and libraries in the rural areas, the librarians lack of computer knowledge and they are not using computers in the libraries.

In the present scenario application of information and communication technologies has revolutionized the whole concept of libraries, the system of information storage and retrieval and ways to access the information. Therefore, the objectives of LIS education have been revolutionized with the E Concept. LIS students are presently given more practical oriented computer knowledge equipped with intensive and extensive use of IT in libraries. Application of technology has opened up new vistas and thus, all LIS schools should think seriously in terms of the changing context. Students are given adequate knowledge of computers (including the hardware), computer and communication technologies, networks and networking, operating systems, Internet concepts, database management systems, along with with adequate practical exposure to handle these technological devices. Online resources, online databases, library management software, e-books/journals practical exposure is given to the students.

In India most of the libraries are switching themselves from the traditional type of services such as documentation services, reference services, inter-library loan, catalogue based services, current awareness services (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) to online services and E-generated library services. The situation is changing rapidly with the application of IT in the libraries. Networking of computers at the local, national and international level has made this possible.

Collection development pose to be another challenge for the information professionals. The main job of the LIS professionals is to provide relevant information to users as fast as possible. Speedy retrieval of information is very important for information professionals. Presently, LIS professionals talk of computer-based information retrieval, use of computer networks for accessing databases and organising library services on networks. The LIS professionals are concerned with the speed, cost and the reliability of information transfer.

6. Accreditation of Courses

There is no accreditation agency in India like the American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Accreditation in USA and Canada to ensure reasonable standards and quality of educational programme. The report of the Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System (NAPLIS) stressed the need for such a body (Agarwal, 1997). The University Grants Commission, India appointed a Committee "UGC Review Committee on Library Science in Indian Universities" under the Chairmanship of Dr. S.R.Ranganathan in the year 1961 and the report published in 1965. So far departments of LIS in the universities have broadly adopted the schemes of papers recommended by UGC Review Committee on Library

Science in Indian Universities, 1965. But its other recommendations regarding staff requirement, physical facilities required and maintenance of department libraries have not been faithfully followed. The Review Committee considered a minimum staff of one reader and two lecturers for the BLIS course. Few universities, who have introduced these courses, have provided the recommended staff standard.

The accreditation agency should be responsible for recommending minimum standards in terms of faculty strength, intake criteria, teacher student ratio, evaluation methods, library and laboratory facilities, availability of teaching materials, finance and physical facilities. It should also take care of regular revision of LIS syllabi for uniformity and standardization in the overall LIS education system.

7. Role of the Government, UGC, Professional Bodies and LIS Professionals

India's LIS education system requires a strategic planning, in order to develop a comprehensive LIS curriculum at the national level. The Government of India has encouraged the application of computers and use of telecommunication through various policy decisions. But the role of the Government in LIS education is not satisfactory. The Government should play a leading role in promoting LIS education in India, in creating more job opportunities for LIS professionals and removing disparity in pay scales among LIS professionals. LIS professionals' pay are low in India and they should be paid more in the present scenario.

The role of University Grants Commission (UGC) is very important in designing the curricula and in providing guidelines for developing LIS education in the country. The role of UGC is becoming more challenging in the context of growing information society and fast growing information technology.

The professional bodies like Indian Library Association (ILA) and State Library Associations should organize useful courses, seminars and conferences so that the library professionals may increase their knowledge and efficiency in the application of ICT in their work.

The library professionals should also put pressure on the Government of India to form a National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. In this context, the role of LIS schools and faculties is extremely important to improve LIS education. Similarly, University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT) (www.dsir.nic.in/vsdsir/division/nissat/nissat.html), the National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), NISCAIR (National Institute of Science communication and Information Resources) earlier known as Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) (www.insdoc.org), the Defence Scientific Information & Documentation Centre (DESIDOC) (www.drdo.org/labs/compsci/desidoc/index.shtml), university libraries, library associations, library and information science departments should play a pivotal role in this direction.

8. Significant Features of Indian LIS Courses

Academic institutions act independently in such activities as admission, tenure, curriculum development, and educational grading. Organizations such as the University General Allocation Commission (UGC) merely serve an advisory role. Although in general all educational departments suffer from inadequate or inappropriate levels of faculty memberships, financial assets, equipment, special library and even accommodation, a handful of universities are in a

relatively better position. Student graduates from these universities fare better in the job market.

There is a lack of a national accreditation centre. Although UGC sets the academic criteria and standards and makes proposals, no national body is charged with their enforcement. There is no control mechanism in place.

There is also an absence of a national policy for LIS education. One of the problems plaguing LIS instruction in India is the absence of any body responsible for making manpower projections for the market at different levels, as well as making policies and educational programming. Thus LIS graduates numbers in excess of market need. This has led to unemployment or under-employment.

In the past decade alone Indian universities have made an unwarranted push towards establishing and developing LIS courses. Without proper groundwork, they started to establish new courses and increase enrolment. Thus the number of MLS programmes has inflated from 38 to 67 by the end of the last decade.

The followings are some suggestions for improving LIS education in India:

- LIS schools/departments may be provided with IT laboratories fully equipped with the latest hardware and software including Internet connectivity, networking and library management software.
- National centre for education and research should be established to plan and coordinate cooperative programmes, like exchange of personnel, curriculum planning, extension lectures, continuing education programmes and so forth.
- LIS departments provide training programmes with ICT specialisation for teacher librarians.
- Seminars, tutorials, assignments and field tours should be effectively integrated with curricula involving outside experts and agencies.
- Syllabus should be revised from time to time with the advent of the information technology changes.
- The syllabi in the LIS departments should view the developments taking place in information technology, information resources, information access and their impact on libraries and library profession.
- It is necessary for the University Grant Commission (UGC) to see how these LIS departments could come up to international standards and the students coming out of these Departments excelled in their work.
- There are many standards and protocols such as Z39.50 standard, Inter library loan Standards, Circulation Interchange Protocol, and the teaching of them in classrooms is necessary.
- Continuing education/in-service training facilities should be recognized as an essential part of manpower development programmes and sufficient financial resources may be allocated for this.
- All the present librarians, who completed their LIS education ten year before, should be provided with computer/information technology training through these new LIS schools or through some refresher courses.
- There is a great necessity of funds for the acquisition of new technology in order to enhance the services in the library.
- There is a need for strong networking of libraries for resource sharing.
- The library professionals need more recognition and they are responsible for planning new information system.
- More orientation courses and refresher courses should be conducted for the LIS

- professionals and teachers.
- The LIS students may have training in libraries, which should have IT environment for gaining practical experience.
 - ICT environment may be created in all types of libraries and information centres in the country.
 - Short term and long-term programmes such as seminars, conferences, and workshops be organized at regular intervals by library schools and library associations.
 - National centre for education and research should be established to plan and coordinate cooperative programmes, like exchange of personnel, curriculum planning, extension lectures, and continuing education programmes and so forth.
 - To improve quality of research, talented scholars should be provided financial assistance by research organizations.

9. Conclusion

Library and Information Science students in India have to compete with other professionals to survive in the information business; they have to be equipped with a curriculum, which can make them function as competent information professionals. In the networked environment there is a strong need for continuing professional education and training. Library professionals requires training and retraining to use IT-based resources and services, such as e-mail, FTP, telnet, www, browsers, search engines, databases, system software, application software, electronic journals, computer conferences, scholarly discussion lists, mailing lists, Usenet newsgroups, websites, CDs and DVDs.

The ground reality of the present LIS education system in India indicates that the quality improvement is essential and unavoidable, not only for its survival but also for facing the major changes and challenges of today and tomorrow. Library schools in India need to look forward and take full advantage of the opportunities lying ahead of us. The use of information technology for training LIS students and professionals has become crucial for meeting the challenges of twenty first century. It has been predicted that a country that leads information revolution will prove to be more powerful than any other country. The significance of the role of library schools to train

manpower for coming decades can contribute to the progress of the nation.

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