

LIS Education in India: Skills and Competencies for Professionals in Indian Libraries

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Abstract

We are living in the highly exciting era. World is changing at a very fast pace. Developments in the field of ICT have impact on each field of our lives. In this background, It is high time that Library and Information Science educators should constantly review their curriculum to include the required modern competencies and digital library skills to prepare young professionals for the emerging areas of librarianship. The students entering in the library science schools need to acquire ICT based information services skills to remain useful in this competitive world. Library schools are expected to train students to continuously enhance their professional competencies so as to prove important in current highly competitive job market.

Keywords: ICT in LIS Education, LIS Curriculum, LIS Education

1. Introduction

To meet the ever-changing needs of the library users in this knowledge era, the young professionals required to be trained in handling contemporary library and information services. The students entering in the library science schools need to acquire ICT based information services skills to remain useful in this competitive world. Library schools are expected to train students to continuously enhance their professional competencies to prove important in current highly competitive job market. Competency can be defined as understanding, knowledge, skills and attitude essential to achieve predefined objectives or goals. Skills are required for carrying a job efficiently and effectively. The students of Library and Information Science, in addition to traditional technical subjects, should be trained to acquire the modern ICT and

management skills and competencies to become efficient and effective professionals.

Library science education in the country is at the crossroads, attempting to incorporate more and more ICT based subjects to meet requirement of international and national job market. When compared with syllabuses of the library science schools of the UK, USA, and Australia it is observed that we have to go a long way to incorporate contemporary topics in Indian library science schools.

2.0 LIS Education in India

The history of LIS education in India is more than a century old. It can be traced back to year 1911 when W A Bowden, American scholar started a library school under Royal patronage of HE Shivaji Rao Gaikwad II, of Baroda. However at university level As a Don Dickson, another American scholar started a Certificate course in Library Science at the then Panjab University, Lahore in 1915. This was the



second known school after the Library school in Columbia University.

It was Dr S R Ranganathan, Father of Library Science in India, who laid the strong foundation of Library Science education in India by starting a Certificate course in Library science at Madras Library Association in 1929. This course had taken over by Madras University in 1931 later. In 1937 the same course was converted into P G Diploma in Library Science. There were five universities conducting Library Science course before Independence.

LIS education in India, which started at Certificate and Diploma level, moved to Masters' and Doctorate level after 1951. The first full fledged Department of Library science was started at Delhi University in 1946, when Sir Maurice Gwyer, the then VC of the university invited Dr S R Ranganathan to Delhi to start a course in Library science. Delhi University was first to start Masters Course in 1951 and also awarded first PhD Degree in Library Science in 1957. University of Delhi was probably the first university to start PhD Programme in Library Science in the Commonwealth Countries. Over the years, LIS has grown in an independent discipline in universities having independent department. It is estimated that there are about 183 LIS Departments affiliated to universities and colleges offering LIS courses at different levels in regular and distance mode.

Library Science education in India has travelled a long way, starting from a Certificate course it now offers Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate and D Lit degrees from more than 183 departments. In addition, there are two independent institutions namely DRTC and NISCAIR (Earlier INSDOC) offering specialized courses in LIS.

3.0 Issues and concerns in LIS Education:

Almost all the Library and information Science schools in India are functioning as an independent department of a university. These are functioning under the rules and regulation of the parent university. This gives them hardly any autonomy and flexibility to act as a professional institution. Most of the state universities are constantly struggling for the funds from UGC and state government. The challenges before most of the LIS schools are:

3.1 Chasm between LIS Education and Practice

Library Science literature is full of surveys where senior LIS professions have mentioned their dissatisfaction over the quality of LIS education in India. Their primary concern is about inclusion of latest IT and management related topics in the curriculum, timely revision of syllabus, inclusion of modern professional practices in the course. They also observed that library schools are preparing for library technicians instead of information service providers.

LIS educators on the other hand argue that students of Library Science should be taught basic principles, theories, and core competencies required to work in different types of libraries. They teach the sound theories of the profession on which applications suitable for different types of libraries could easily be developed. LIS teachers further argue that there are very few takers of highly specialized course modules.

3.2 LIS Teaching Faculty:

In any discipline, the quality of faculty and students ultimately determine the excellence of education. As per the available literature in the field, it has been

observed that most of LIS departments in Indian universities have inadequate number of teachers. One or two faculty members are running a large percentage of departments only. To fill the gap departments appoint part time or temporary teachers. Alternatively, retired teachers or professionals are taking the classes to cover the syllabus. Another big challenge is how to ensure that LIS teachers update themselves with emerging technologies and their applications in LIS field. It has also been reported in the literature that most of the departments are carrying out repetitive research in the form of M.Phil or PhD thesis.

3.3. LIS Students

The survival or thriving of any discipline would largely depend on a healthy strength of student intake. LIS is considered as one of the popular professional course by the job seeking students and most of the students join the course for seeking jobs instead of their passion for reading or providing services. It is also observed that LIS is not the first preference course of almost all the students seeking admission in library schools in India. Students in India prefer to join Medical, Engineering, Management or Law schools as a first choice. LIS has very low preference over other courses. Due to proliferation of Engineering, Law and Business schools in last two decades admissions in LIS schools have further dropped. A few of the LIS schools which require higher % of marks for admission even do not get sufficient number of students applying for the course.

3.4. Syllabus updating or enhancement.

Earlier researches conducted by several authors have reported that syllabi of almost all the departments of LIS are revised after long intervals,

whereas professional feel that syllabi should be revised or updated almost every year. Technology is growing so fast that new topics or applications should be considered for teaching to the students of this most dynamic profession. This has created a wide gap between teaching and job requirements in the libraries.

3.5 Lack of Infrastructure

Almost all the LIS Departments are functioning as a small unit in their university or college. LIS Departments, with hardly any exception, are struggling for proper space, latest computer hardware with high speed connectivity and even basic teaching aids. Multimedia production labs are almost missing in the LIS departments. Teachers are still dependent on traditional “Chalk and Talk” method of teaching. Lack of seminar rooms, budget to purchase latest books in department library, etc further adds to the misery of the LIS departments.

3.6 Accreditation of LIS Courses

National accreditation bodies for quality assurance and other aspects accredit LIS programmes in many countries like USA, Canada. A large number of working LIS professionals has been showing their concern about lack of accreditation system for LIS professional course. IFLA and other international bodies have also been advocating for national accreditation system for quality assurance and standardization in LIS education

4.0 Enhancing Competencies and Skills

A number of studies have been conducted world over to ascertain competencies and skills needed to be covered in programs of study of various library science schools, keeping in mind future job requirements in different types of libraries.

The Association of College and Research Libraries recommended that library schools should train graduates in theory, principles, and history of librarianship; in-depth knowledge of the higher education environment; preparation for scholarly work; understanding technological issues; conducting information literacy programs; planning and management; assessing library effectiveness; knowledge of legal and policy issues; consideration of ethical issues; and understanding and appreciation of diversity (Reichel, 1999).

IFLA (2000) guidelines for professional library/information educational programs recommended that the core elements in an LIS curriculum should include:

- .the information environment, information policy and ethics, the history of the field;**
- .information generation, communication and use;**
- .assessing information needs and designing responsive services;**
- .the information transfer process;**
- .organization, retrieval, preservation and conservation of information;**
- .research, analysis and interpretation of information;**
- .applications of information and communication technologies to library and information products and services;**
- .information resource management and knowledge management;**
- .management of information agencies;**
- .quantitative and qualitative evaluation of outcomes of information and library use.**

Morgan (1996) grouped competencies that the future academic librarians should possess in addition to core library skills into four areas: credibility with academic staff; teaching and training; IT-related skills; and management skills

The five competencies most highly rated by academic librarians in a survey conducted by Buttlar and Du Mont(1996) were: knowledge of sources in all formats; conduct an appropriate reference interview; apply critical thinking to library problems; communicate effectively in writing; and utilize oral presentation skills to make presentation.

The different studies conducted by various organizations from time to time have suggested a number of competencies or skills required to be imparted to the students of schools of LIS. A few of them are as mentioned below:

- ❖ Basic Skills (For Entry level LIS Professionals)
 - ◆ Principles of Library Science
 - ◆ Collection development
 - ◆ Cataloguing
 - ◆ Classification
 - ◆ Reference and Information Services
 - ◆ Circulation
 - ◆ Serial Control.
- ❖ ICT or Technological Skills
 - ◆ Digital Libraries
 - ◆ Web site design; Web applications
 - ◆ Computer/information/Internet networks
 - ◆ Digitization; digital preservation/design
 - ◆ Information architecture

- ◆ Cyberspace law & policy
- ◆ Knowledge management
- ◆ Competitive/business/strategic intelligence
- ◆ Human–computer interaction (HCI); user–system interaction
- ◆ Interface; user interface
- ◆ Metadata
- ◆ Computer/network security
- ◆ Internet reference/applications
- ◆ Information seeking behavior
- ◆ Multimedia/moving images
- ◆ XML; JAVA/C/script languages
- ◆ Digital publishing
- ◆ Natural language processing (NLP)
- ◆ Electronic commerce
- ◆ Visualization
- ◆ Usability
- ◆ Distributed systems
- ◆ Computer supported cooperative work (CSCW)
 - ◆ Other single courses (e.g., Beyond Google; Data mining; Gender &
 - ◆ computerization; Matching mechanism)
- ❖ Management skills
 - ◆ Creativity & innovation
 - ◆ Planning and organization
 - ◆ Resource Management
 - ◆ Communication skills
- ◆ Leadership

- ◆ Marketing
- ◆ Organizational understanding
- ◆ Global thinking
- ◆ Analytical Skills
- ◆ Problem Solving Skills
- ◆ Interpersonal & group
- ◆ Decision making
- ◆ Flexibility & adaptability
- ◆ Ownership, Accountability, ownership

Based on the literature and various surveys conducted by different authors, it is proposed that LIS Departments should have two years course leading to Master's degree. The first year should cover the basic skills as mentioned above and second year should be dedicated to specialized competencies and skills modules in ICT, Management and other related fields.

5.0 Conclusion

LIS profession being highly vibrant and fast growing profession is undergoing complete meta-transformation, in the present digital age, in socioeconomic environment, knowledge and scholarship. The present digital age has brought many opportunities in LIS education much greater than ever before. Its gamut has expanded many folds spatially and temporally. On one side, ICT gives many opportunities to initiate new information services and on other side, teaching is not just limited to the classrooms as students now have access to unlimited reading material through networks. Government of India through MHRD is also promoting use of online courses including MOOC, etc. LIS Departments are further

collaborating with other disciplines to give better exposure to the students.

It is high time that LIS educators constantly review their curriculum to include the required modern competencies and digital library skills to prepare young professionals for the emerging areas of librarianship. It is suggested that basic core foundation subjects must be taught but at the same time, most modern competencies required by young professionals should also be covered during the course of studies.

With the introduction of ICT inputs at Masters level job opportunities of Library Science students have increased significantly from the earlier days. Students are even being recruited in corporate sector as well. LIS professionals also have opportunities to undertake additional responsibilities in the organizations. This include Webmaster, managing scholarly output of the organization, facilitator and promoter of open access movement, setting up Institution repositories, plagiarism checking, nodal professional related to IPR issues, research collaborator with other institutions, pedagogy including MOOCs coordinators, etc. The digital revolution has really brought multiple opportunities to LIS profession. It is up to the professionals and LIS educators to grab this opportunity or miss the bus and take LIS in the category of extinct professions.

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