Quality Assurance in Library and Information Science Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to look into the process of quality assurance of Library and Information Science (LIS) Education in India. Review of literature is done on the library and information science education globally to collect information on LIS education and its quality assurance. The study finds that apart from of few agencies like ALA in USA and CILIP in UK there is no agency or body at national and international level for quality assurance of LIS education. The study is limited to quality assurance of LIS education in India only. This paper enlightens about the quality assurance in LIS education in India. The main issues of quality assurance and the challenges are highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: Library and Information Science, LIS Curriculum, LIS Education, LIS Education, Quality Assurance, Quality Assurance- LIS education

1. Introduction

Formal education in Library and Information Science (LIS) was started with the establishment of School of Library Economy in 1887 by Melvil Dewey who was the librarian of Columbia College (now Columbia University) in New York City, USA, though it is claimed LIS education started in Germany during early nineteenth century (Richardson, 2010).

In UK the Library Association (LA) wrote and taught the syllabus through correspondence courses till 1960's which is renamed as the Chartered Association of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). CILIP accredits LIS programmes in UK as well as a number of LIS programmes in China, Germany, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. (https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/Qualifications)

In France the foundations of library and information science was laid by Paul Otlet and Henri Lafontaine in the late 19ᵗʰ century and later by Suzanne Briet, a French librarian and pioneer in information science in the mid 20ᵗʰ century. (Heinstrom, 2012) It was precisely in 1974 that a composite field named "Information & Communication Sciences" was carved out of existing university disciplines in France.

Library and Information Science or Information Science education which was earlier termed as Library Science started in the Asian countries much later in comparison to western countries and the USA and the LIS education in Asia are influenced mainly by UK and USA LIS education. (Deka, 2017)

LIS education in India:

We are living in the everyday changing world inevitably encouraged by the growing amount of information. There is an incredible transformation

in the universe of knowledge in general and unambiguous subjects in particular. Library and Information Science is also not untouched. The LIS Education is also shifting swiftly in entire globe. The Maharaja of the princely state of Baroda Sayajirao Gaekwad III initiated the LIS education movement of India who invited William Alanson Borden in the year 1911 to start the library training programme which is a part of the development of the library system in the state. (Neelameghan, 1974).

In the University level Library Science education in India was started at Punjab University, Lahore which is now at Pakistan in the year 1915 under the instruction of the University Librarian Asa Don Dickinson as a certificate course. Therefore, we can say that India and Pakistan both share the same history of formal library science education though the library training programme was started in the year 1911. In 1935 Andhra University started a diploma course which was upgraded to a postgraduate diploma course in 1961. Due to efforts of S R Ranganathan a postgraduate diploma course in librarianship was started by Madras University in 1938. In the year 1941 Banaras Hindu University (BHU) started postgraduate diploma course in LIS. As per the data available in Indian Library Association (ILA) website 19 Central Universities, 72 State Universities and 37 Private Universities in India are providing LIS education in regular and distance mode (https://www.ilaindia.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&catid=8&Itemid=111).

A wide range of programmes of different levels were taught in various institutions all over India. The programmes in LIS started with some in-service training, which was the demand during that time.

Gradually the structure was changed to certificate level programme, then diploma programme and to bachelor level programme and ultimately master's programme. These up gradations or the divisions are based on the need of different levels of LIS professionals in the libraries. Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC) of Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Bangalore and National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi are conducting two special programmes of LIS of which the programme of NISCAIR is discontinued. Programmes like M.Phil and Ph.D were started for developing expert manpower in research and development of LIS and for the up gradation and development of the subject.

The aim of LIS education in early period was to produce quality manpower but the trend is changing with time with production of large number of LIS professionals. The level of LIS programmes was one-year BLibSc and one-year MLibSc or in some cases one-year BLIS and one-year MLIS or one-year BLISc and one-year MLISc which helped to prepare two levels of library professionals for different levels of job and ranks. This trend started to change in late nineties with the introduction of two-year integrated master's degree programme. But all the institutions offering LIS programmes are not following this change. In some states of India like Uttarakhand, Orissa three/one-year bachelor degree programme are also offered by some institution. A new trend of offering five-year integrated master's degree programme is seen recently by few universities like University of Calcutta and Annamalai University. It has been discontinued by the UGC.

Quality Assurance in higher education

Quality is a relative term interpretation of which is different in different context. According to Merrian Webster online dictionary meaning of quality is "degree of excellence/superiority in kind/ distinguishing attribute" in different context (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quality)

Quality assurance in higher education came into focus in 1999 in the Bolonga Declaration, a joint declaration after a meeting the ministers of education of 29 European countries in Bolonga, Italy. The declaration calls attention to promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. It also emphasizes on promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

After Bolonga Declaration in September 2003 a conference of ministers of higher education from 33 European countries met in Berlin, Germany to set objectives and to set priorities of the European Higher Education area. In the Berlin conference the ministers agreed to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance in higher education sector.

UGC is the regulatory body of higher education in India which was established in 1956. It controls the higher education in all parameters through National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) which was established in 1994. NAAC has involved in creating quality consciousness among the higher educational institutions in India at a regular interval. But quality assurance and control are a continuous process and that is why NAAC suggests forming a cell for regular monitoring and improvement of quality in the institutions.

Quality Assurance in LIS Education

In international level we have a few professional bodies involved in accreditation and quality assurance like American Library Association (ALA) in USA, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in UK, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in Australia.

Again, a number of bodies are working as advisory body in LIS education like American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), American Association of School Librarians (AASL), American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST), Medical Library Association (MLA) USA, and the international organization IFLA.

ALA and Quality Assurance:

American Library Association (ALA) which was established in 1876 accredits programmes in Library and Information Science for master's degree in USA, Canada and Puerto Rico. An external review panel of practitioners and academics make the verification of the programmes whether the programmes meet the Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies of ALA.

In the Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies adopted by ALA on February 2, 2015 and the revised version of it on January 28, 2019 five areas are focussed. These are standard I: Systematic Planning, standard II: Curriculum, standard III: Faculty, standard IV: Students, and standard V: Administration, Finances, and Resources.

CILIP and Quality Assurance

In UK, the course on LIS is generally accredited by Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP). The CILIP is a professional body formed in the year 2002. It is a result of amalgamation of LA and Institution of Information Scientists. "Almost all universities offering LIS degrees do apply for and gain accreditation from CILIP, and where appropriate the Society of Archivists." (Lowe, 2006)

At present, there are 20 universities which are providing LIS course accredited by CILIP out of which 18 provide post graduated course (cilip.org.uk). For quality assurance of the institutions provided LIS education, this Body has taken various measures, one of such measures is assurance of individual competence. "CILIP (CILIP 1992) in UK has started a certification program of individual competences. For this procedure, there is need to provide evidence of an individual's fitness for professional practice. This evidence consists of a professional development report, a portfolio and an interview with the person to be certified." (Tammaro). This Chartered Membership of CILIP is an advantageous in getting job of academic librarian in UK.

IFLA and Quality Assurance:

IFLA is an international body which has been working on quality education in the field of LIS education. IFLA published its 'Standards for Library School' in 1977. Later on it has been revised and republished in 2000. The most recent one is released in 2012 as 'Guidelines for Professional Library/ Information Educational Programs, 2012' and replaces the last one. These IFLA Guidelines covers all of the core issues in seven broad areas i.e. The

Larger Framework, Curriculum Element, Curriculum, Faculty and Staff, Students, Supports and the last one is Instructional Resource and Facilities. Under each Guideline, a set of instructions are incorporated which leads to quality assurance of LIS education.

Indian Scenario

In India there is no regulating body to control the quality in LIS Education. Overall quality of higher education institutions is monitored by NAAC. Therefore, we cannot expect quality assurance of LIS education from a non professional regulatory body like MCI, BCI, NCTE, AICTE etc.

In the vision of Draft National Education Policy 2019 says "The National Education Policy 2019 envisions an India centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all". Therefore, quality of education is given proper importance here and to achieve this proper quality control mechanism is necessary. We used to claim or declare that LIS education is a professional education. But, here in NEP, 2019 only Agriculture and allied disciplines, Legal Education, Healthcare Education, and Technical Education are included as professional education.

Regarding the regulatory bodies of the different professional education is suggested in NEP, 2019 that "the overall regulatory framework created for higher education will be extended to professional education and National Higher Education Research Agenda (NHERA) will remain the sole regulatory authority".

It also suggested that the regulatory role of the 17 or more professional councils such as the BCI, ICAR,

MCI and others, with regard to professional education, will be converted to Professional Standard Setting Body (PSSB). Their job will be to specify professional standards and / or a curriculum framework, against which educational institutions will prepare their own curricula.

(https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/ Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf)

Therefore, we have to create sufficient pressure on UGC with proper justification and in this regard ILA has taken a step of sending a memorandum where the need of accreditation of LIS programmes on pattern of ALA, MCI, NCTE, AICTE etc. was brought up. (https://www.ilaindia.net/images/pdf/ Accrediation.pdf)

Issues and challenges:

Since the inception of formal LIS education in India a series of development is observed in the LIS programmes. There are various reasons behind the changes but it has led to many challenges to LIS education in India. And, that is why a need is felt of quality control in LIS education in India. We notice that the programme of LIS running in different universities in India lack uniformity in the structure. We have two years integrated MLISc programme, two years integrated MLibISc programme, one-year BLISc Programme, one-year MLISc, one-year BLibISc, one-year MLibISc, five-years integrated master's degree programme offered by different LIS schools. Because of these different types of programmes the course content of the programmes has a wide disparity. Also because of the rapid development of the subject and the inclusion of ICT in diverse areas of LIS to keep the right balance between the core of librarianship and the application of technologies in the LIS course contents has

become a tough job. Besides this facility offered by the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) education to enroll in LIS programmes without any barriers of intake capacity has diluted the quality of LIS education, which is ever-increasing unemployment problem. Besides these challenges to quality of LIS education in India there are lack of proper facility of computer laboratory and tools of classification, subject heading lists and thesauruses etc. for hands on practice and shortage of qualified manpower.

Therefore, an urgent need is felt for quality assurance in LIS education in India. At present only University Grants Commission (UGC) is doing the quality check through National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). But it is not exclusively for LIS education and it has some limitations also. So, there is an urgent need of an accreditation agency exclusively for LIS in our country.

Uniform Course Nomenclature:

It is a high time to think of uniform course nomenclature throughout the country. For accepting the challenges coming to the way of individual libraries and LIS schools, one has to play a major role in taking the responsibility for the same. After 2001, the LIS education in India is not given much importance by the government. The course curricula are not updated regularly and since then no initiative has been taken by the UGC or the government. So, in absence of proper guidelines all the LIS schools have framed their own curriculum following the Karsiddappa Committee Report of 2001 with addition and deletion as per the need of the hour. Today the world is changing very fast in all dimensions and directions. The LIS schools are also adopting the changes which are coming to their way, which leads towards the adoption of different course curriculum

by the different schools. It has become very important that a uniform course curriculum must be adapted at the earliest for the betterment of LIS education.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

❖ Higher education in India is an enormous growing sector and it draws the attention of student community worldwide especially from the third world countries. For quality assurance of higher education, the government has taken various initiatives through NAAC and NIRF.

❖ A guideline can be developed for quality assurance in LIS education in India based on ALA Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies, 2019; and Guidelines for Professional Library/ Information Educational Programs, 2012 of IFLA.

❖ The LIS Professionals body in India like IASLIC, ILA, IATLIS, etc should come forward and design a standard guideline for LIS education to maintain the uniformity.

❖ As the LIS education is to some extent a professional education, therefore a separate body for assessment and accreditation of this course is a need of the hours.

❖ Mushroom growth of LIS educational institution both in regular as well as in distance mode may hamper in maintaining quality. Therefore, a national recommending body is required which can recommend before opening a new LIS schools in India.

❖ The LIS courses must be recognised as Professional Course by the UGC and other accrediting agencies.

❖ To have practical exposure to the courses taught to the students in LIS schools in various areas, one has to understand the live working condition in a library. In the LIS schools theoretical knowledge are imparted more in comparison to practical knowledge, so all the LIS schools must have a provision of internship in the respective courses to understand the subject in better way.

❖ LIS schools should organize orientation programme for teachers, librarians and other library professionals from time to time on latest trends in the profession.

❖ All LIS schools must initiate campus recruitment for placement of their products

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