



Curriculum reforms and quality education in library and information science departments in Indian universities and institutes: An overview by

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Abstract

Curriculum is a roadmap of skills, competencies and processes that the learners needs to acquire and learn. LIS departments in the universities and other educational institutions have no particular curricular frameworks. The Indian Ministry of Human Resources Development initiated essential steps in this direction. According to Curry and Temple, a curriculum framework is “a document (usually developed at the state level) that suggests the best thinking about the knowledge, skills, and processes students should know and understand about a particular discipline, and that provides a structure within which to organize the other important curricular components of the instructional system”. This paper discussed the development of LIS curriculum, efforts being taken to revise LIS curriculum and course contents offered in UGC Model Curriculum.

Keywords: library and information science education, LIS school, LIS curricula, curriculum development and courses

1. Introduction

LIS schools of India must find full competencies and confidence to work in an electronic environment in the 21st century. Effective training should be given to information managers in India because of the world wide competitive environment. The changing needs of library users call for excellent IT skills among the LIS professionals in India (Mahapatra, 2006, p.2) ^[12]. “LIS curricula have taken these challenges into consideration and revised their course structures thus competing with the demands for manpower from the contemporary information society. The majority of universities switched over to a two year integrated Master’s degree in Library and Information Science and adopted the suggested curricular programme in total or with little modifications to suit local needs and demands” (Varalakshmi, 2006: 338-346) ^[20]. We can easily design a list of course modules for any academic program at the local, national and international level, but LIS education is facing many challenges in the realization of the aims of conceiving and implementing the revised curriculum. The challenges how to bring changes in curricula that many faculty members continue to fill comfortable to deliver but students suffer with rote learning. The Library Schools should strike an optimum balance between theory and practice keeping in view the vivid developments of IT and end users environment. The traditional pattern of course structure and its coverage looks ironical in the face of upcoming sophistication and socio-economic impacts. Courses are running irrespective of benchmark quality of curriculum excepting a few faculties and thus leading to unhealthy professionalism and bottlenecks. Total quality control from the point of entrance to the course would ensure professional ethics, proper knowledge assimilation and strategic capabilities amongst the Library and Information Science devotees (Das, Bhagwan, 1997, 198-201) ^[6]. ‘The debate about changing the library and information

science curricula has been going on for the last few years, but at national level no concrete programme of action has been launched. The UGC Model Curriculum 2001 was the best effort by the LIS experts by the LIS experts towards the manpower needs of the 21st century. However, the LIS Model Curriculum should be continuously revised at least after five years. The UGC Model Curriculum was revised more than a decade back, but no effort has been made till date to redesign the model curriculum. Technology has totally changed and LIS is a profession which has the direct impact of IT so that it required immediate revision. With the advent of advanced information technology, the gap between the infrastructure available with the elite institutions and ordinary institutions is increasing day by day forcing the professionals working in both types of institutions to compete with each other in terms of their response to various educational, technological and economic changes. If they do not update and develop their knowledge base and skills respectively, there is a potential threat to their survival (Singh, 1997: 204) ^[16]. Curriculum contents are innovated whenever there is a professional development. This might result in frustration among the students/teachers. However, curriculum frameworks eliminate the frustration. A Committee for the ‘Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education in India was appointed under the Chairmanship of Prof. Yash Pal. The Committee in its report proposed curricular reforms. The UGC (2007) identified the issues and proposed action plan strategy to develop. This was to ensure horizontal mobility of students between universities (Baradol, 2009) ^[2]. Gorman (2004) ^[8] believed that there is a crisis and new model of library education, varying in severity from country to country, but omnipresent nonetheless. The researcher also believes the need for new (or resuscitated) models of library education that will meet the demands of libraries and librarianship in the years to come. The gap between what is being taught in many

LIS schools and what is being practiced in most libraries is wide and widening. Equally, the increasingly different life experiences of LIS educators and library practitioners contribute to mutual misunderstanding. LIS schools of today produce a quantity of pure research that is either in peripheral areas or in areas unrelated to library work. Though these changes have been driven, to some extent, by changes in the culture of academia, they have to a greater extent been driven by changes in the people who teach as LIS faculty (Gorman, 2004) [8]. In the Bachelor's programme the conventional library services/activities are taught. For Bachelor's and Master's programme together the courses taught are Foundations of Library and Information Science, Information Sources, Information Communication Technology, Information Processing-Classification, Information Processing-Cataloguing, Management of Libraries and Information Centers, Research Methodology, Management Information System, Digital Libraries, Web Designing, Metadata, Knowledge Management, Conservation and Preservation of Information Resources etc. For the Master's programme there are core courses and non-core courses. In the core courses the management of libraries and information centers, information processing-classification, cataloguing and indexing, information sources and services and information technology are taught. In the non-core courses the different information system, of namely, public library systems, health library systems, industrial library systems information marketing, etc. are taught. As we move to the new paradigm, represented by a switch from industrial age technologies to the electronic age of information and communications, we have to manage the turmoil that results and that which we cannot withdraw to some hidden place society's standards change (Benjamin, 1994: 54) [4]. "So the specific items that we might exclude from a collection today or in two decades will undoubtedly change. Let me highlight two interrelated professional values that will be most significant in defining who we are in the light of changes most likely to occur in coming decades. These are accountability and personal orientation-values that define any profession and us as librarians. These are the values that the more reflective practitioners regard as the keys to our identity and our success in society. Our professionalism is a state of mind, an attitude, as well as an application. Ours is a client-oriented profession, and without clients we have no purpose. Therefore, we must orient our services towards the client and must seek to demystify instead of confuse" (Shaw, 1994) [15].

2. Development of curriculum

It is necessary to examine the adequacy of the present curricula, modify the curricula to suit the present digital era and to assess the inputs in terms of quality of the students and skills of the teaching faculty and the establishment of necessary infrastructure facilities (UGC Model Curriculum, 2001: 83). The curriculum content of the subject in Indian universities before the 1970s was almost entirely based on traditional views of the Library Sciences. But the syllabi adopted by the University of Delhi in 1972 heralded a new era by incorporating a number of elements that today form part of the information sciences. It served as a model for most of the Indian universities for quite long. But the winds of change

gained momentum in the late 1980s and the information science claimed a larger share of the LIS curriculum contents. Traditionally Indian LIS education has given much emphasis on library techniques as half of the BLIS curriculum contents used to be devoted to the theory and practice of classification and cataloguing. But new contents designed particularly in 1990s have drastically reduced the proportion of practice in specific systems (Joshi, 1999: 18-19) [9]. Therefore, curriculum development should be viewed as an ongoing dynamic process always in a state of implementing constantly planned changes. The process of curriculum design should be adoptable and applicable to different subjects and situations. Teachers should have a primary role in the design process. They should not be relegated to a secondary position in identifying appropriate curriculum for their students based on their ongoing experiences.

3. Efforts to revise Lis curriculum

University Grant Commission emphasis on design and development of model curriculum for the Library and Information Science education in India and some of the efforts are as follows:

3.1 Ranganathan Committee on Universities and College Libraries

The UGC formulated a Committee under the Chairmanship of Ranganathan on University and college libraries in the year 1957. In 1965 the report of this committee was published by the UGC under the title "Development of University and College Libraries". This report covered all aspects of academic libraries including the education and training of professional librarians. The Committee recommended that the university departments should offer only professional courses and certificate courses should be stopped in universities. The Committee also recommended the quantity of faculty and also specified the teachers and students ratio according to courses offered by the universities. Finally the committee recommended that another Committee be formed to look into the quality and standard of library education.

3.2 Ranganathan committee on library science in Indian universities

The UGC appointed a Review Committee in the early 1960s under the Chairmanship of Ranganathan to review the standards of teaching and research in library science in Indian universities. The Committee's first meeting was held on 15th July, 1961 in the office of the UGC, then located at Rafi Marg, New Delhi and its second meeting was held on 29th September, 1963 in the office of UGC, then located at Mathura Road, New Delhi. This Committee had circulated a questionnaire to Indian universities for collection of data related to existing facilities in Departments of Library Science (UGC Model Curriculum, 2001:5) [19]. In 1965, a report was published by the UGC, "Library Science in Indian Universities", which detailed a review of Library Science Education. The Committee's recommendations related to LIS curricula, qualifications for teaching posts, minimum qualification for admission in B.Lib.Sc., M. Lib.Sc. and PhD courses. Traditionally some library schools were teaching other non-professional subjects like languages, general

knowledge, cultural history etc. The Committee recommended a change in the nomenclature of the LIS course and also recommended a model syllabus of LIS courses (BLIS and MLIS). The Committee designed the LIS curricula for professional courses (BLIS, MLIS) and it was adopted by almost all library schools in India with minor changes. The Committee recommended the redesignation of the diploma in Library Science to BLIS, offer only professional courses like BLIS, MLIS, PhD while also recommending the provision of a six-month apprenticeship period before BLIS. In the BLIS courses there should have been a minimum of two lecturers and one reader while for MLIS there should be one professor, two readers and four lecturers as recommended faculty by the Committee. In BLIS the teacher student ratio should not exceed 1:10 and 1:5 in MLIS (Mangla, 1998) ^[13]. It recommended an independent teaching department of Library Science, similar in all respects to other departments in the universities. The Committee called upon the UGC to organize a survey of the new entrants coming out of universities and their employers to assess the need for library professionals and the quality of university products. This report was the first exhaustive document related to teaching of library science education in India (Joshi, 2010) ^[10].

3.3 UGC panel on library and information science

In the 1970s LIS curriculum was significant as certain changes occurred in Indian Library Education regarding its changed components like information storage and retrieval, computer application etc. In 1973 and 1977 two national level seminars were organized by the Department of Library and Information Science of Delhi University, sponsored by the UGC. These seminars were on methods of teaching and evaluation in library science and LIS education. The panel made some recommendations on LIS courses and curriculum saying that the nomenclature of the department may be changed to reflect the changed curriculum. It also recommended a two year integrated programme for MLIS, LIS department in universities as well as an independent status as other teaching departments, along with adequate infrastructure to offer research programme of M.Phil and Ph D (UGC, CDC, Report of the Curriculum Development Committee on Library and Information Science, 1992: 11-12) ^[18].

3.4 Kaula Committee

In the early 1990s the Curriculum Development Committee was constituted by the UGC under the Chairmanship of Prof. P.N. Kaula on Library and Information Science. The Committee submitted its report in 1992 under the title "Report of the Curriculum Development Committee on Library and Information Science". The Committee prepared a model curriculum for Library and Information Science courses (BLIS, MLIS, M.Phil and special courses). The Committee suggested to LIS schools to specify the objectives of each course offered by them. CDC made recommendations regarding admission to the courses, saying that the admission should be on the basis of academic achievement, admission tests as well as interview and teaching methods, aids, other infrastructural resources. The medium of instruction was to be English only. CDC also recommended regarding the faculty position for BLIS course should be one Professor, one Reader

and three Lecturers and for MLIS there should be one Professor, two Readers and five Lecturers and an independent status of the LIS department similar with other disciplines. The curriculum designed by the CDC remained a model for subsequent curriculum revision exercises done by the departments. (UGC, CDC, Report of the Curriculum Development Committee on Library and Information Science, 1992: 23-31) ^[18]. After the publication of this "Report of the Curriculum Development Committee on Library and Information Science" the LIS schools in India were helped to update their curricula as per the requirements of the profession during those periods.

3.5 The Karisiddappa Committee

In the year 2000, after the Curriculum Development Committee (1992) ^[18] many changes took place in the Information Communication Technology, which had a direct impact on the libraries and LIS education in the whole country. The need for immediate restructuring of the LIS curricula was felt. The UGC constituted three groups of experts under the Chairmanship of Dr. C.R. Karisiddappa, they met for reviewing and sharpening of the modules and course contents. All the aspects of the LIS curriculum discussed and followed up the modular approach for all LIS schools in India. The Model Curriculum was a collective effort made by a large number of LIS experts, working librarians, teachers, scientists etc. The Committee submitted its report in the year 2001 under the title "UGC Model Curriculum, Library and Information Science". The Committee recommended that "in view of the emerging network environment, in view of the fundamental shift in the goals of the library, and in view of the changes in information storage and delivery mechanisms, the educational programme should cater to the needs of these changed settings by including in their course contents, the knowledge and skills required to function effectively in such an environment (Mahapatra, 2006) ^[12]. The Model Curriculum emphasized for the two year integrated Masters Degree in LIS along with objectives, marking pattern, number of credits, practical components, teaching hours, infrastructural requirements. Presently most of the LIS schools in India follow their course structure as per the recent CDC report (2001).

4. UGC model curriculum 2001

The UGC Model Curriculum has given a lot of freedom to the LIS departments to design their syllabus with modifications as per the local needs. Karisiddappa Committee recommended that the "revision of syllabus be undertaken very cautiously in a break-even manner, not entirely overawed either by the invasion of IT or by sentimental attachment to various philosophical and historical components". The report provides six core modules and one elective module. The modules are: Foundations of Library & information science; Knowledge organization, information processing and retrieval; Information sources, products and services; Management of libraries & information centers/ institutions; Information technology: basics and applications; Research methods and statistical techniques; and Electives. An illustrative list of ten elective options is available in the syllabus. The electives belong to the study of different specialized subjects, e.g.,

Business information system, environmental information system, Agricultural information system, etc. there are a number of practical papers introduced such as: Knowledge organization, information processing and retrieval practice; Information technology—basics (practice); Information sources and services (practice); Information retrieval (practice); Information technology: applications (practice) (Mahapatra, 2006: 4) ^[12]. The Curriculum Development Committee (2001) took care of maintaining a balance between the traditional and technological elements in this model curriculum.

Library and information science was also influenced by the impact of computer and communication technology by the end of the twentieth century. Due to the advent of the information explosion, information revolution, exponential growth of knowledge, changes in the information scenario as such multimedia, CD-ROM, on line Information Retrieval Systems, Web via the INTERNET were the buzz words. LIS professionals feel that they must be equipped with the new technology to handle the challenges and they should be familiar with existing knowledge, tools and techniques. "Growing impact of the new technology (Computer and Communication technology) demands that libraries of today should be able to harness information technology so as to ensure optimum utilization of resources for storing, organizing, retrieving, and disseminating information to the right quarters at the right time" (UGC Model Curriculum 2001: 7) ^[19].

The UGC Committee's feeling was regarding the manpower of LIS department. They have emphasized only traditional subjects, philosophical aspects and historical aspects and not only on Information Technology and practical aspects. They felt the need for change of LIS syllabi. It was the responsibility of LIS schools to bring radical change in their syllabus by introducing automation and networking, software development, database management, information search, CD-ROM, digital libraries, electronic publishing etc. UGC emphasis to reduce some teaching of traditional techniques, the philosophical aspects of the profession and its ethics etc. and emphasis on training in computer software development and use of latest telecommunication techniques. They also focused on proper weight age to philosophical, theoretical, technical, historical, information technology and peripheral aspects (UGC Model Curriculum 2001: 9) ^[19].

5. Conclusion

The curriculum of the future will continue to contain those basic elements that have characterized education for librarianship since its origins: professional foundations, technical services, reference and user services, collection management, and administration and management. These elements will remain because the mission of information service, to bring information to people, remains unchanged, although the way in which we express these elements may well evolve. However, by and large, this change has been uneven, unplanned, uncontrolled, and fraught with difficulties and suspicions, and resulting in unbalanced or even dying education programme (Gorman, 1999) ^[7]. LIS professionals lack ICT skills and encounter problems in the job market. This brought up the need for an accredited agency in India to

recognize the LIS courses. LIS curriculum requires monitoring and a statutory body like the ALA to accredit programs according to international standards. Information literate professionals must have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. It is obvious that our educational programme, curriculum and syllabi have to be such as to meet the national and internationally viable needs and global challenges.

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