

THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN LIBRARY EDUCATION: NEW STRATEGIES IN THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA, SRI LANKA

W.A. Weerasooriya*,

*Professor Dr., Dept. of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.
sooria29@yahoo.com

Abstract

The principal aim of this study is to identify the threats and opportunities face by the library education movement in Sri Lanka with special reference to Department of Library and Information Science (DELIS), University of Kelaniya Sri Lanka. The paper explores how the DELIS could counter these threats with the help of curriculum development strategies. Objectives of the study were to identify what is library education movement, to study threats and factors affecting library education with special reference to DELIS, to explore how DELIS overcome these threats and to develop a model of a curriculum design system. Methodology adopted in the study comprised the analysis of vision, mission, stakeholder, content and SWOT. The factors and threats affecting the library education in Sri Lanka can be categorized in to two aspects as macro and micro. Macro aspects are non-recognition and non-identification of the library sector in the government hierarchy particularly the higher education sector, dubious bureaucracy, and lack of cooperation among the principal library education contributors. Micro aspects of threats are the grass root level factors. These threats are rapidly changing subject knowledge content and relevancy, lack of communication and ICT skills among the Library and Information Science (LIS) students, perennial decrease of library science students' intake, negative thinking and attitudes among LIS professionals. Identifying this critical situation, the DELIS is in the process of revising its LIS curriculum drastically suiting to the current demands and requirement in the Student Centered Learning context. The others are the inclusion of extraordinary course units, revising curriculum at every four year period, empowerment of industrial training component, identification of series of competencies, allocation of more ICT course units, inclusion of project based English course unit at every semester, introduction of more practical project based course unites particularly in Classification, Cataloguing, compilation of bibliographic tools and Literature survey project reports in Science and Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities. ICT, communication, management and language skills are some of the essential soft skills which should inculcate among the undergraduates. It is proposed to empower the curriculum evaluation process and further propose to set up a Curriculum Revision Committee with the representation from the principal library education contributors in Sri Lanka, library professionals and the government and private sector. It is observed that a benchmark system introduced so far has to be revised accordingly. These are some of the new strategies in the curriculum development in the Department and they could be applied in the other curriculum development processes.

Keywords: Library education, Curriculum development, competencies, Sri Lanka, Training and development, professional education

INTRODUCTION

The principal aim of this study is to identify the threats and opportunities face by the library education movement in Sri Lanka with special reference to Department of Library and Information Science (DELIS), University of Kelaniya Sri Lanka. The paper explores how the DELIS could counter these threats with the

help of curriculum development strategies.

Objectives of the study were to identify what is library education movement, to study threats and factors affecting library education with special reference to DELIS, to explore how DELIS overcome these threats and to develop a model of a curriculum design system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Irving (1983) report elaborates various factors like absence of topics related to the development of attitude to service and users, lack of statements related to teaching and learning aims, objectives and assessment methods in library science syllabi. The significance and the relevance of the recommendations and comments of Irvin report are yet valid.

Both the University Grants Commission (2011) and the National Knowledge Commission India (2008) stress the necessity of curriculum changes, internationalization of higher education, revision policy of curricular, changes in credit allocation and the semester systems in the higher education.

Lankage (1990) notes the validity of certain elements in the curriculum development in librarianship i.e. definition and formulation of course objectives; course contents and plans; student and teacher guides; evaluation and development.

Bowden (1998 and 2002) specifies the need of inclusion of knowledge management in library curricula and the relevance of ICT in library education in Sri Lanka.

Dillon and Norris (2005) advocate failure of the curriculum of most LIS programmes to address sufficiently the education of librarians.

Suraweera (2008) suggests facilities and other points in developing qualitative aspects that should be included in future curriculum revision in the Department. They are to maintain IT laboratory with minimum of 50 Pc's with internet connectivity. She further adds "the Technical English paper should be introduced for B.A. (General) Degree and it should be compulsory course unit for both B.A. (special) and B.A. (General). It is essential to improve students reading skills, specially read unless English books, periodicals, magazines and E literature. Suggestions included improving students' information skills to acquire knowledge from printed information environment as well as web environment. Extra-curricular activities should be introduced to improve competencies among each student."

METHODOLOGY

Methodology adopted in the study comprised the analysis of vision, mission, stakeholder, content and SWOT. Researchers own experience and the observation and the data taken from the literature review were helped to finalize the research design part. Since this study is related to continuous education process, best research method adopted was the action research. This type of study deals with qualitative research. Therefore, telephone interview, peer groups discussions, discussion with industry employees and employers were also used for data collection.

MAJOR THREATS FACING THE SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The factors and threats affecting the higher education in Sri Lanka are, new changes and revisions that are to be introduced in the area of higher education in the developing, medium developed and the developed world, curriculum and staff development, quality assurance, industrial collaboration, socialization of higher education, new endeavors for widening the higher education, research and development, funding measures for the higher education, the manpower development in ICT education, the cultural and ethnic harmony, identification of qualities, attributes and characteristics for the 21st century graduates as to become world citizen.

The factors and threats affecting the library education in Sri Lanka can be categorized in to two aspects as macro and micro. Macro aspects are non-recognition and non-identification of the library sector in the government hierarchy particularly the higher education sector, dubious bureaucracy, and the lack of cooperation among the principal library education contributors, negative thinking and attitudes among LIS professionals.

Micro aspects of threats are the grass root level factors. In the pedagogical approach, they are the rapidly changing subject knowledge content and relevancy more minutely say iinformation literacy training and development, application of digital libraries, digital preservation, place of copyright in online dissemination of information, information needs analysis of users, development and new demands in the subject LIS. In the

pragmatic approach, they are the assistance for finding reliable and most appropriate accurate information at the right time, managing the information overload, assistance for teaching and learning and research process, managing change, student skills and competency development, , lack of communication and ICT skills among the LIS students, perennial decrease of library science students' intake.

DISCUSSIONS: STRATEGIC APPROACH

In order to address threats and weaknesses, it was planned overseer best opportunities that can be used within LIS curricular and of using other strategies. First and foremost, it was very essential to consider the vision and mission of the DELIS in curriculum development in the DELIS. They are as follows.

Vision

“To make the staff, students, graduates and professionals in the field to be highly regarded and acclaimed as moral, practical, strong and self-confident academic and professional leaders for the advancement of discipline of Library and Information Science as well as for achieving the goals of a knowledge based society”

Mission

“To produce valued, competent and dedicated Library and Information Science professionals for the nation, Asia and beyond, through effective teaching, guiding, training and research”

Graduate Profile

Strategically planning, the DELIS realized to produce a graduate profile for the BA Special undergraduates considering the vision, mission in both the university and the department of the study, and stakeholder views. The Graduate Profile is as follows.

“To produce high quality graduates possessing skills, behavioral and attitudinal competencies needed for the knowledge managers having a strong demand in the local and foreign employment market and highly valued and recognized persons in the present society”

Setting goals of the new curriculum

This new degree programme has been designed in order to achieve the developmental goals of Sri Lanka as well. Followings are the Five Fundamental Goals (FFG) of this new curriculum.

1. To produce high quality world citizens
2. To produce high quality capable and competent persons
3. To produce high quality library and information professionals
4. To produce prospective employable graduates
5. To produce high quality social contributors

COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

Based on FFG and all other requirements, it was planned to develop a list of competencies expected from the BA Special graduates through this curriculum.

Competencies are more than skills and they are added value sets and aggregates that a person should possess. When Knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, conceptual understanding, behavioural qualities and norms are merged and developed together in a person, they are interpreted as competencies. Special Library Association (SLA) (1998) defines competencies as “combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviours important for organizational success, personal performances, and career development.” DELIS assures that this curriculum and the exposure will develop the following competencies among the students under five headings given below. Since the Communication skill is to be the leading competency among the

professional library staff in Sri Lanka (Weerasooriya, 2008) and (Wanasinghe 2013), it was justifiable inculcating the students with creative skills, language skills both vernacular and the English.

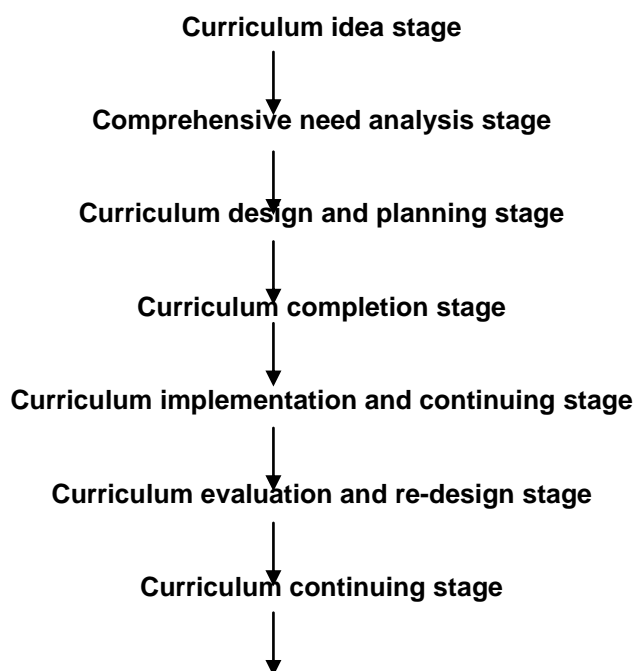
1. Knowledge, understanding and the practice of the subject
2. Communication and IT
3. Management and Administration
4. Personal and professional development
5. Competencies related to social development

CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was clearly realized that more practical work have to be assigned to students and therefore altogether 7 practical project based assignments were included in the new curriculum. Since the LIS is a field which rapidly transforming into ICT based discipline, altogether 7 LIS ICT course units were introduced. Since the Communication is to be the leading competency among the professional library staff in Sri Lanka, the English course unit which was conducted traditionally, was revised as Creative English with aiming to inculcate productive, creative and business writing skills of the undergraduates. Students were given the opportunity to learn and practice language skills from the beginning of their first year. For considering three consecutive facts vs. The developing readership skills and drive among the Sri Lankan community, the emphasizing the library need and awareness among the library stakeholders particularly the communities and political and administrative officials and for the motivating and emphasizing the library staff for research purposes course units 01. Reading, readership and developmental reading, 02. Library advocacy and policy development, 03. Statistics for library and information science were introduced respectively in this new syllabus.

These threats particularly the micro level factors related to library education in Sri Lanka are to be addressed with applying favourable steps and processes. Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) and the DELIS of the University of Kelaniya, identified the best opportunity was to revise the curricular of all the Department of studies in the FSS. Having realized this situation as the major threat, the DELIS planned to revise its syllabus along with other parallel Department of studies in the FSS.

More revisions and modifications were introduced in order to address the above issues. Some of them are the inclusion of extraordinary course units, revising curriculum at every four year period, empowerment of industrial training component, identification of series of competencies, allocation of more ICT course units, inclusion of project based English course unit at every semester, introduction of more practical project based course unites particularly in Classification, Cataloguing, Compilation of bibliographic tools and Literature survey project reports in the three main disciplines, Science and Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities. ICT, communication, management and language skills are some of the essential soft skills which should be inculcated among the undergraduates. It is proposed to empower the curriculum evaluation process and further propose to set up a Curriculum Revision Committee (CRC) with the representation from the principal library education contributors in Sri Lanka, library professionals and the government and private sector. It is observed that a benchmark system introduced so far has to be revised accordingly. Evaluation of this curriculum is another step which has to be done by the Faculty or the department level within a stipulated time period. These are some of the new strategies in the curriculum development in the Department and they could be applied in the other curriculum development processes. Moreover, students' competencies are developed through Student subject Association called Library and Information Science Student' Association, and other students' organizations such as English Society, IT Society and the Model Library Society in the DELIS. It is envisaged that the educational field trip and the industrial training are principal techniques which develop high competency level of the students of the DELIS. Individual final year students is given an assignment to write his or her life story and future career plan and path describing how he or she achieves the goals of future professional career and it is given as a mind mapping tool also. It can be illustrated the proposed model of a curriculum design system as follows.

Figure 01. Proposed model of a curriculum design system

It is presumed that this type of model (Figure 01) can be applied in any socio-economic, political, technological and cultural setting or any environment. The next step is to make a qualitative study in order to test this model since this study is adopted the action research design.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A panel of experts consisting of Prof. Jayasiri Lankage (Subject Consultant) including the department staff Prof. Piyadasa Ranasinghe, Prof. M.K. Weerasinghe, Ms. Namali Suraweera, Mrs. P. Wanigasooriya, Rev. L.Piyarathana. Special appreciation has to be paid to Prof Piyadasa Ranasinghe for his valuable contribution in the curriculum revision. Senior most visiting Faculty members comprising Mr. J.A. Amaraweera the Librarian, Buddhist and Pali University Sri Lanka, P.B. Gallaba, Acting Librarian, University of Sri Jayawardhanapura and Mr. Nimal Hettiarachchi, Senior Assistant Librarian, University of Ruhuna substantially supported to develop this curriculum. The suggestions of both internal and visiting lecturing staff of the Department, and the views of the senior practicing librarians were also taken into consideration when drafting this syllabus. Researcher appreciate very much their valuable service and make special mentioning for the assistance given by the Prof. Sunanda Maddumabandra, the present Vice-Chancellor, the then Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Prof. A.H.M.H. Abayaratne the present Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences and Prof. Lal Daharmasiri, Faculty Coordinator of the IRQUE project. I appreciate the service rendered by Professor Sarath Amunugama the former Vice-chancellor in this project.

The syllabus revision was carried out with the funding support of the IRQUE project.

REFERENCE LIST

Bowden, Russell (1998) Curricula development for economic change. *Sri Lanka Library Review*, 12 (2), 35-40.

Dillon, Andrew and Norris, (2005) Crying wolf: an examination and reconsideration of the perception of crisis in LIS education. *Journal of Education for*

Library and Information Science, 46 (94), 280-298.

Irvin, Ann (1983) Report on education and training for library and information work. Colombo: NLSDB.40-48.

Lankage, J. (1989) Library education and training in Sri Lanka. *International Library Review*, 21, 67-72.

Lankage, J. (1990) Curriculum development in library science. *Library Science*, 1(1), 9-15.

Namali Suraweera, S.A.D.H (2008) Conference proceeding on “determinants of Academic Performance of Library and Information Science (LIS) Undergraduates” National Conference on Library and Information Studies (NACLIS) held on 24th June 2008 at SLFI, Colombo: SLLA.

National Knowledge Commission (NKC) 2008) Towards a knowledge society-three years of NKC, New Delhi: National Knowledge Commission.

Special Libraries Association (SLA) (2003) “*Competencies*,” Available from <http://www.sla.org/content/learn/comp2003/index.cfm>. (Accessed on 10th July 2005).

University Grants Commission (2011) Inclusive and qualitative expansion of higher education: compilation based on the deliberation of the working group for higher education in the 12th five year plan (2012-17, New Delhi: UGC.

Wanasinghe, W.M.P.G.K.T. (2013) University librarians’ competencies and scope of the library and information science curricular (LIS): a case study of Sri Lankan universities.MSSc. thesis, Kelaniya: University of Kelaniya.

Weerasooriya, W.A. (2008) Human resources planning in university libraries in Sri Lanka. Ph.D. thesis, Pune: University of Pune.

Weerasooriya, W.A. (2008) Conference proceeding on “milestones in the road map of library and information education and research in Sri Lanka” National Conference on Library and Information Studies (NACLIS), held on 24th June 2008 at SLFI, Colombo: SLLA.