Information Science Education in Ethiopia
- an overview -

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Abstract:

   Information Science education aims to train personnel to work in libraries and information centers in a professional way.   The introduction of ICT and Computer Science in Information Science curriculum paved the way for introducing new courses so that the students who are coming out of the Department of Information Science should be able to handle new way of processing, storing and retrieving information. There is a need for human resource development in almost all fields of knowledge. Recognizing the importance of qualified labour force the government in Ethiopia provides higher education to the new generation in every disciplines. Ethiopia is in need of more professionals in the field of Information Science. In fact the availability of quality information services in academic institution is very essential for research. The university libraries in the country needs trained man power for the proper functioning of its information centers. The staff need training to provide relevant information to the right reader at the right time. Universities of Ethiopia are on the right track and they need necessary support from the administrators, policy makers, politicians, industrialist etc. They should recognize the value of this profession and able to absorb the trained manpower in the economy.

Key words: Information Science Education, Ethiopia – Information Science Education, Education – Information Science, Information manager, Information Specialist, Library and Information Science.

Introduction

Education for information specialist is undergoing a facelift during this 21st century. The development of Computer

Technology and Communication Technology induced changes in the education for librarianship. To meet the demands in information centers of present time there is a need for qualified professionals. Information science education should cater to the growing demands for information science professionals. Abioye (2013) opined that although early Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, particularly librarians did not undergo any formal training the modern day challenges of library and information work require that personnel should be well-trained and educated to make for effectiveness. Introduction of ICT and Computer Science in the Information Science Curriculum paved the way for introducing new courses so that the students who are coming out of the Department Information Science should be able to handle the new way of processing, storing and retrieving information. This also will help them to provide relevant information to the right user at right time.

Education for Information Specialist

In this global economy information plays a significant role for the development and growth of the country. Trained personnel is a crucial factor in retrieving and disseminating relevant information in libraries and information centers of academic and research institutions. The educational institutions in different countries train students in different courses to prepare them to meet the information needs in various organizations. In the United States and Canada, it generally consists of a one- or two-year Masters degree program in Library Science. In Europe a librarian can have a three- or four-year Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Studies or Information Science; separate Master's degrees in Librarianship, archive management, and records management are also available. In Germany and some other countries, the first step for an academic librarian is a PhD in a subject field, followed by additional training in librarianship. In India

Library and Information Science education is being offered as a Post graduate course under two streams: as a one-year BLISc and one-year MLISc, and as a two-year integrated MLISc (Varalakshmi, 2006). Master of Philosophy in Library and Information Science (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science (PhD) too are provided by many Indian universities. There is no uniformity in the courses as the departments are offering courses from certificate to research level and follow different patterns or combination of patterns (Varalakshmi 2010).

At present Information Science deals with its history, philosophical bases, concepts, theories and methodologies of the science. It emphasizes the definitions and properties of information, formal and informal information systems, information origination, transfer, classification, formatting and use. It also introduces basic issues in information science, including the nature of information, overview of information science, bibliometrics, information retrieval, communications and artificial intelligence, information policy, knowledge organization, information services, and the relationships between information technologies and society. Theories and concepts of information science are integrated with a variety of practical tools for the structured design and analysis of information systems. With this new areas are added with the emergence of multimedia, semantic web, metadata, data mining, digital libraries etc.

Evolution of Information Science Education in Africa

Libraries and Information Science (LIS) education institutions in Africa started quite early as 1960 in the continent. By 1980s, there were five main LIS education institutions based in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda (Okello-Obura and Kigongo-Bukenya 2011). As the world changes with the application of technology and also due to globalization the nomenclature of LIS education program to undergone changes.

A quick look at Africa shows that in the early days the departments were known as Departments of Library Science/Library Studies or Librarianship. In the eighties many departments changed their names to Department of Library and Information Science/Studies. In the nineties, many of these departments again changed their names to Information Science/Studies (Minishi-Majanja and Ocholla 2004).

Ethiopian Context

Ethiopia is a developing country. One of the most important need of today is to have trained personnel in all sphere of knowledge especially in the field of Information Science. Creating sufficient number of information professionals plays a pivotal role in knowledge management of the country and to meet the information need of present day society.

An organized formal professional training in concern with library started in Ethiopia in 1959 with a few short courses organized by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and National Library of Ethiopia and a first Ethiopian graduate was sponsored to obtain his professional qualification at Master's level from the United States. Diploma and a minor in Library Science programme plan was set up and organized by the Ministry of Education and Arts by the 1968 – 1969. Diploma programme and a new programme of Bachelor in Library and Information Science (BLIS) started from 1988 – 1989 academic sessions. With full assistance of International Development Research Center (IDRC) and UNESCO, a new programme leading to Master's Degree in Information Science started with the establishment of the School of Information Science for Africa (SISA) at the Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 1989 – 1990 academic sessions. But the training of librarians in undergraduate degree and diploma programme ceased in the university since 1994.

In Ethiopia two universities, Jimma University (2005) and Haramaya University (2007) offer LIS education

programmes as Information Studies and later changed the nomenclature as Information Science. Mekele, Gondar and Adama universities (2010) started the course Information Science as three year undergraduate programme. Later Adama University discontinued. Assosa University (2011) and Medawalabu University (2013) began Information Science Programmes to meet the increasing demands for LIS professionals in the country.

At present four Master's programmes are offered at three universities. The School of Information Science at AAU runs a MSc. in Information Science (MScIS). The department of Information Science at Jimma University runs a MSc. in Electronic and Digital Resource Management (MScEDRM) and a MSc. in Information and Knowledge Management (MScIKM) in parallel. The Department of Information Science of the Haramaya University gives a MSc. program in Information Science (MScIS)

Now the country had launched national modular curricula for Bachelor of Science in Information Science Programme and which is adapted by all the universities in Ethiopia.

Library system in Ethiopia and the role of LIS profession

Ethiopia has a National Library that supports public, academic, school and special libraries and offers academic training in librarianship.

Even though Library staffs are the backbone of the library and librarian plays an important role in providing effective information service to users still society does not consider librarianship to be a prestigious profession. That is why Addis Ababa University, in the late 1990s unjustly changed the Department of Library and Information Science into the Department of Information System. This move resulted in a decrease in the number of professional librarians in the

country. This, in turn, has caused problems, not only for university libraries but also for the development of the library profession in Ethiopia. Currently, the number of library and information science graduates in Ethiopia is not more than 600 in a nation that has more than 76 million people (Yared Mammo 2010). Even today in University libraries diploma holders and degree holders from other subject field are working as librarians. This too affects the status of professional librarians in the country.

Library and Information profession has a pivotal role in different types of libraries. A study by Darch (1975) mentioned that unless librarians in Africa are accepted as equal partners in the vital process of preserving oral traditions and, in countries like Ethiopia, of discovering and recording perishable manuscript materials, a large pool of expensive talent will be underutilized, and much time will be lost. If librarians are underpaid and undervalued, if the concept of the *Metsahaft Zebagna*, the guardian of the books, persists, then the least dynamic, least gifted members of the university community will end up as librarians, setting up a vicious circle which may be difficult to break out of.

The academic ranks of library professional in universities are Librarian, Associate Librarian, and Assistant Librarian I to IV. Librarian I is equivalent to Graduate Assistant and Assistant Librarian III is equivalent to Lecturer. Still Ethiopian universities are lagging behind in fully qualified professional staff. The students of Information Science after graduation seeking jobs ICT related areas.

The status of librarian is not encouraging in Ethiopia and currently information processing and information management tasks are handled by administrative officers or IT specialists in Ethiopia. There is lack of awareness among employers about the need for information professionals to manage information and knowledge, which can be fulfilled by Masters in Information Science. The professionals are not recognized by the public either. Therefore the primary need is

to create awareness among the employers and the public in general on the significant services that a professional information manager can offer in the enhancement of academic, research and general knowledge of the individuals. Such initiatives help to improve the image and status to the profession and the services of the professionals will be accepted and recognized.

Suggestions

For the growth and development of Information Science profession in Ethiopia there is a need for proper support from Government, Management, Librarians and Users.

- ➢ Priorities should be given for the establishment of libraries and information centers in all types of educational and research institutions in the country.
- ➢ Management should promote research and development for extending and improving library and information services for the people of Ethiopia.
- ➢ There is a need for legislation in this knowledge field and it should be made compulsory for all the educational institutions from school to universities to employ only trained personnel as librarians.
- ➢ Information managers should have job motivation, keenness in providing quality service to users and also willingness to learn new skills.
- ➢ Information manager should strive to uphold the profession and establish networking with professionals inside and outside the country.
- ➢ Library associations should look for different methods to raise the profile of the profession within the country.
- ➢ Information literacy training should be provided to the users which may help to increase the visibility and importance of this profession.
- ➢ The users should recognize the role of information specialists in providing information services.

Conclusion

In this 21ˢᵗ century it is a fact that knowledge is power and this knowledge should be located, organized, stored, retrieved and disseminated in a proper way for the development of a nation. Only with the help of trained manpower the nation can attain this objective. Currently the universities of Ethiopia are on the right track and they need necessary support from the administrators, policy makers, politicians, industrialist etc. They should recognize the value of this profession and be able to absorb the trained manpower in the economy.

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