Developing Competencies of Library & Information Professionals – An evaluation of LIS curriculum of ODL Institutions in India.

Dr. G. Saroja, Assistant Professor
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad. A.P. India.
Email: drgsaroja@hotmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and Information are the key resources for development in the present day Information Society. Hirotaka Takeuchi, one of the main thinkers of knowledge creation said *"If knowledge is the engine of development, then learning must be its fuel."* Knowledge encourages people's participation in development. Lack of application of knowledge and technical know-how accentuates the process of marginalization and economic deprivation. Therefore, education should aim at imparting process-oriented and skill based learning which can help people gain livelihoods and foster development.

By linking literacy with livelihood, education contributes to the development. John Daniel (2004), says "marrying literacy and livelihoods is an important step in tackling the poverty reduction targets of the Millennium Development Goals". Livelihood, according to Chambers R and Conway (1992, p.7), "comprises of building the capabilities, assets and activities required for a living". By imparting the basic skills necessary to earn employment or involve in income generating activities, education helps one to enhance the already existing skills and enables to live with dignity in the society.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a popular approach for ensuring access, equity and quality education in a cost effective manner. Many vocational and technical courses offered through distance education thrive to enhance the economic status of people contributing to development.

Library & Information Science (LIS) courses have lot of potential to develop the knowledge and skills required to sustain and survive in the present day knowledge society. Globalization and liberalization has opened up multiple career options to the LIS professionals. The traditional roles of LIS have changed with the advances in Information and Communication Technologies. LIS professionals are expected to be academics of higher order with competence to work in a hypertext, networked, digital environment. Hence, the LIS education should impart the learners, the necessary skills to gain employment upon graduation and to develop the vision and understanding to help them cope better with the rapidly changing world. This study examines the status of LIS education in India and discusses the various skills required for the new era Library & Information Professionals.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Compare the content of LIS curricula of IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU;
- List out the core subjects taught in LIS courses;
- Evaluate the adequacy of various skills imparted by the LIS curriculum of Dr.BRAOU.
- Assess how the LIS courses have contributed to the employment of Dr.BRAOU learners with respect to change in designation and salary structures.

II. LIS EDUCATION IN INDIA

In India, "Librarianship" over the period of time has established as a discipline of study and changed over to "Library and Information Sciences". LIS education in India is offered at different levels like – Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, M.Phil. and Ph.D. The University Grants Commission in India has been instrumental in formulating Model Curriculum of the Subject. UGC from time to time has appointed number of committees towards framing the guidelines and syllabus. The Ranganathan committee on "Library Education" (1960); Kaula Committee on Curriculum Development in LIS Education (1990); and Karisiddappa committee on Curriculum Development (2001) have recommended offering LIS education at two levels- Bachelor's and Master's each of one year duration. The latest UGC Model curriculum (2001) recommended with option that universities may opt for offering either two year integrated M.L.I.Sc course after Graduation or B.L.I.Sc and M.L.I.Sc each of one year duration. In India, LIS education is imparted through more than 118 universities and institutions.

A total of 105 universities provide Bachelor's (B.L.I.Sc) courses, 78 universities provide the Master's (M.L.I.Sc) courses, 21 offer two-year integrated courses, 16 universities provide M.Phil, 46 universities provide Ph.D., 2 universities provide D.Litt Degree. Besides, the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi and Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore provides Associateship courses which are equivalent to M.L.I.Sc degree.

Out of the 14 Open Universities, five are offering LIS courses at Bachelor's and Master's Level. Nalanda Open University Offers LIS course at the Certificate level and Kota Open University, Rajasthan offers LIS education as PG Diploma Course. In addition, IGNOU offers PDLAN – one year PG Diploma course in Library Automation and Networking. Ph.D. is being offered by IGNOU since 1996. From 2008, Dr.BRAOU has introduced M.Phil. & Ph.D. Programmes. Apart from these, the Directorates of Distance education also offer LIS courses. Table -1 shows the information about the universities offering LIS Courses through Distance Education.

Table-1: Universities offering LIS Courses through Distance Education.

University	BLIS	MLIS	M.Phil.	Ph.D.	Certificate
Alagappa university, Karnataka	1997	V	-	-	-
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, A.P.					
Annamalai university, Annamalainagar	1985	1991	-	-	-
Awadesh Pratap Singh university, Rewa	V	-	-	-	-
Institute of Open & Distance Learning, Bhopal	1975	V	-	-	-
Berhampore Univesity, Berhampore	V	-	-	-	-
Bharatidasan University, Tiruchurapally	1992	-	-	-	-
School of distance education, Calicut University, Calicut	V	-	-	-	-
Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	1985	1996	2008	2008	-
Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University, Gujarat	-	-	-	-	-
Dr.Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar	V	V	-	V	-
Guru Ghasidas University, Bilaspur	V	V	-	-	-
University of Hyderabad	PGDLAN				
Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi	1986	1996	-	V	PGDLAN
Kakatiya university, Warangal	1989	-	-	-	-
Directorate of Correspondence courses, Kurukshetra	V	V	-	-	-
Lalit Narayan Mahila University, Darbhanga	V	V	-	-	-
Directorate of Distance Education, M D University, Rohtak	V	-	-	-	-
Kota Open University	-	-	-	V	-
Madras University, Chennai	V	V	-	-	-
Madurai Kamraj University, Madurai	1990	V	-	V	-
Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Chitrakoot	V	V	-	-	-
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth	V	-	-	-	-
Patna University, Patna	V	-	-	-	-
Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati	1993	V	-	-	-
UP Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad	V	V	-	-	-
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik	V	V	-	-	-
Nalanda Open University, Bihar	V	V	-	-	V
Netaji Subhash Open University, Kolkotta	-	V	-	-	-

Pt. Sunderlal sharma Open University, Chattisgarh	Under	proposal			

V = courses offered; **-** = course not offered; **n.a** =not available.
Source: Mahapatra, G. (2006).

III.   METHODOLOGY

In the first part of the paper a comparison of LIS curricula of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University (Dr.BRAOU) is made. The comparison of content is studied with respect to the nature of content.

According to Benjamin Bloom's (1984) taxonomy of Learning, the curriculum should incorporate the six processes of learning namely -Basic Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. These six processes can be grouped into two categories namely knowledge-oriented or information-oriented. In the present study, content of the curricula of IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU are grouped into these two categories based on the proportion of the content in each group to the total number of units which is represented by percentages. The content is also analyzed in respect of the traditional concepts and modern concepts in Library & Information Sciences. Core subjects taught in both the universities are listed.

To examine the adequacy of competencies imparted and livelihood provided by the LIS profession, a micro level survey is conducted on 50 (25 B.L.I.Sc and 25 M.L.I.Sc) learners who have completed their graduation from Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open university. Due to time and access restrictions, non-random convenience sampling is followed to collect data from the respondents.   The respondents are asked to rank the skills listed in the structured questionnaire, as to the extent of coverage in the curriculum. The data is analyzed using a point scale where the first ranked option gets the maximum points and the last option chosen will get the least points.

IV.   ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

4.1.   *Comparison of LIS Curricula*

A curriculum is a fundamental part of any education programme. It provides a list of courses or modules offered in a programme and gives information on content, purpose, method, time/duration, trainers and location or situation of a programme - all of which are essential in a successful dispensation of manpower training and education.

 The electronic environment of the 21st century demands skills like technical, managerial and IT skills on part of the LIS professionals to access and use the electronic resources, tools and media. UGC and other national level organizations are making efforts to revise and update the syllabus so that LIS professionals will be more qualitative in the market for their job prospects. According to Arora & Mujoo-Munshi (2000,p.11-24) " while libraries in India are increasingly using services and products of new IT, the library schools in India are slow in restructuring their curriculum in the light of changes taking place due to potent technological revolution". The emerging demands of digital libraries and e-learning technologies warrant restructuring of the LIS curriculum in India.

The B.L.I.Sc program consists of 6 courses in IGNOU and 8 courses in Dr.BRAOU. M.L.I.Sc program consists of 7 courses in IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU. The seventh course of M.L.I.Sc is elective course. Each course is again divided into blocks and units. Comparison and grouping of blocks into these two categories revealed that at B.L.I.Sc. Level, IGNOU curriculum includes 65% process – oriented subjects and 35% knowledge-based subjects whereas for Dr.BRAOU, 60% is process-oriented and 40% is knowledge-based. At Master's level, 80% of process-oriented content and 20% knowledge – based content for IGNOU whereas in Dr.BRAOU, it is 75% of process-oriented and 25% knowledge-based. There is not much difference between the two in terms of content of the curriculum. Core subjects taught in LIS program are shown in Table-2.

Table – 2: Core Subjects of B.L.I.Sc & M.L.I.Sc programs offered by IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU

Core subjects of B.L.I.Sc.	Core Subjects of M.L.I.Sc.
Library & Society	Information Communication and Society

Library Management	Management of Information Systems & Services
Classification Theory and Practice	Information Processing and Retrieval
Cataloguing Theory and Practice	Information Systems and Programmes
Information Sources and Services	Application of Information Technology
Information Technology Basics	Academic Libraries (elective)

Historical development of Libraries, the provisions of copyright and Press and Registration Act, Digital Library concepts are introduced in BRAOU curriculum which are not covered in detail in IGNOU curriculum. Management Information System (MIS), MARC, CCF, Non Print Media are discussed in more detail in IGNOU curricula at B.L.I.Sc level.

While most of the content for M.L.I.Sc is similar in both the universities, Research Methodology is offered as elective in IGNOU while Dr.BRAOU offers it as a compulsory course. Curriculum content in both the university departments varies mainly in the electives offered. Preservation and Conservation of Library Materials which represent the traditional subject of Library Science is offered as an elective in IGNOU, while Dr.BRAOU has dealt this aspect as a minor unit at B.L.I.Sc level. Technical Writing gives an orientation towards the editing tools and processes, language style and helps to improve communication skills of the students. This topic is offered as elective course in IGNOU while it is totally ignored in Dr.BRAOU curricula.

Curricula of both the Universities represent a mix of traditional library subjects and modern concepts. Table-3 shows the traditional and modern concepts that are covered by the curricula. Topics like - Information Literacy, Library in the multi-cultural society, digitization received very less attention in the LIS curricula of IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU.

Table-3: Traditional Library concepts and modern concepts of Information Science in the curricula

Traditional Concepts	Modern concepts
History and Development of Libraries	Library Automation, Library Application Software
Preservation and conservation of Library Materials	Multi-media information sources
Cataloguing of Books	Online Public Access Catalogue
Library Systems and services	Design and development of Databases; Database Management Systems
Library Orientation	Computerized Information Retrieval; Online Search and Retrieval of Information; e-journals & e-books
User needs and user surveys	Internet basics etc.
Inter Library Loan	Networking & Resource Sharing; Consortia

4.2. *Development of Competencies*

The term 'Competency' is defined in various ways. A decade ago, competency was considered in terms of personal characteristics and was judged in terms of character, virtue, innate abilities. In the present day, competence is considered more in terms of skill-oriented behavior and observable actions. Competency is defined by Council of Europe as "the set of knowledge and skills that enable an employee to orient easily in a working field and to solve problems that are linked with their professional role" (Webber, 1999).

Over the years, librarians have successfully established practices and skills to handle the storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. While the traditional skills such as classification, cataloguing, indexing, user education are relevant even in the present age, the library professionals should acquire skills to deal with information in the new electronic environment. In addition to the technical skills, librarians should also possess good interpersonal and management skills to become more effective managers of information. In order to fulfill the key information role, the new era librarians require Professional and Personal competencies. Professional competencies relate to librarian's knowledge of various information sources, technology, management and research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge for providing library and information services. Personal

competencies represent a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions and survive in the new world of work. The LIS educators have a greater responsibility to incorporate these various competencies into the LIS curriculum.

In this study, the core competencies required for LIS profession are grouped into the six categories and the respondents are asked to rank them as to their coverage in the curricula. Table-4 reveals the extent of coverage of the skills in the LIS curriculum of Dr.BRAOU.

Table -4: Ranking on the coverage of competencies in LIS Curriculum of Dr.BRAOU

Skill/Competency	Points scored	Rank obtained
Library Management skills	170	1
Resource building skills	126	3
Technical skills	150	2
Reference skills	108	4
Information Technology skills	96	5
Personal skills	66	6

The learners ranked Library Management skills, Technical skills and Resource Building skills in the first, second and third positions respectively. These skills are adequately covered in the Library Science program of the university. Coverage of Information Technology skills is ranked as the second lowest which indicates the need for more attention to this aspect. The Personal skills are ranked as the last, showing least coverage in the curriculum. The curriculum therefore needs to focus on developing personal skills like – language skills; developing inter-personal communication and social behavior of the learners.

Learners indicated that on an average, 60% of the skills learnt during the course are useful to them in their day to day library activities.

Respondents expressed the need for apprentice program of at least 3 to 6 months duration in a fully computerized library to gain practical experience. More focus should be given to online subscription of books and journals.

4.3   *Livelihood Provided By Library & Information Science Courses*

The sample population surveyed consists of 10 learners who have joined the university without any job experience and other 40 learners with experience ranging between 5-20 years in the LIS profession.

Nearly 60% of the respondents indicated that there is change in their salary and designation after obtaining their LIS degree from Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University. For 20% of the respondents, only their designations have changed. The other 20% respondents who joined as without any employment have secured jobs in the profession after obtaining the University degree.

Survey results indicated that 20% of the respondents are working in consolidated pay ranging from Rs.5000 to Rs.10, 000/ per month. The Gross salary of the rest 80% respondents ranged between Rs.10,000 to Rs.40,000. This indicates that the course is contributing to the livelihood of the learners.

With the emergence of corporate houses and multinational companies, the demand for library & information professionals has increased. Proliferation of Engineering colleges, number of private colleges, business schools increased the demand for skilled library professionals. As indicated in the survey the salary ranges between Rs.10, 000 and Rs.40, 000 per month.

The profession is a satisfactory and well-paying one. The salary for a librarian in a medium-level management institute is between Rs.30, 000 and Rs.40, 000 per month, which equals the professor-level scale in a University. However, experience counts for a senior librarian's post.

Those possessing computer and IT skills, good knowledge of databases and search techniques, digitization of materials and the skills to work in a networked environment, will have good job opportunities to work in a specialized research or technical institute where the salary package is also attractive.

V. CONCLUSION

The content analysis of two open universities reveals that there is not much variation in the content. They differ mainly in the electives offered in M.L.I.Sc program. The content in both the universities represents a mix of traditional and modern concepts which is more suitable for Indian situation. In India, several academic libraries are managed using traditional methods, while several others have adopted the Information Technology based Library Services. In this situation, the LIS schools may have to provide educational inputs for both manually operated traditional library systems as well as fully computerized and networked libraries. Offering IT courses or course on digital libraries as electives will be a convenient option.

Topics like - Information Literacy, Library in the multi-cultural society, digitization received very less attention in the LIS curricula of IGNOU and Dr.BRAOU.

The survey of Dr.BRAOU learners revealed some interesting findings. While Management skills, Technical skills and Resource building skills have proper coverage in the curriculum, the adequacy of IT skills and Personal skills received least attention. Learner's expressed the need to re-orient the curriculum to incorporate skills to work in the digitized and networked environment.

An observation of the duties performed in various library jobs makes it clear that different levels of library positions require different skill sets. At the basic level, the learners may require practical skills to perform the job and at the middle and top levels they need to improve their managerial, professional and good communication skills. LIS educators should take this into consideration while framing the syllabus for LIS courses at different levels i.e., certificate, Graduate and Post Graduate levels.

The survey analysis in the context of livelihood reveals that the learners of Dr.BRAOU have settled down well in the profession with gross salary ranging between Rs.10, 000 to 40,000. All the respondents who joined the course without employment have secured jobs. For others, the degree has helped them in the change of their designation, Career Advancement and in securing higher positions in the profession.

Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the new information jobs, the LIS courses should provide the learners with necessary skills with which they can gain employment upon graduation, as well as give them a vision and understanding to cope with the rapidly changing world.

REFERENCES

1.   Arora, J. & Mujoo-Munshi, U. (2000) *Accepting the challenge of information technology: Reinventing the library & information science profession in the new millennium. **In** Proceedings, SIS Conference.*

2.   Bloom, Benjamin, S. (1984) *Taxonomy of educational objectives.* Boston, Allyn and Bacon

3.   Chambers, R. and G. Conway (1992) *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century.* IDS Discussion Paper 296. Brighton

4.   Daniel, John (2004) *Learning for Life in a Changing World - Literacy and Livelihoods: Learning for Life in a Changing* World. Commonwealth of Learning.

5.   Karisiddappa, C.R. (2001). *Model Curriculum: Library and Information Science.* New Delhi, UGC.

6.   Mahapatra, G. (2006). *LIS education in India: Emerging paradigms, challenges and propositions in the digital era **In:*** proceedings, Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education & Practice, Singapore

7.   Ranganathan, S.R. (1960*) Report of the Library Committee of the University Grants Commission.* New

Delhi: UGC.

8.   Webber, Sheila (1999) Competencies for Information Professionals. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*, 26(1). http://www.asis.org/Bulletin/Oct-99/webber.html