QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE LIS EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA: AN INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

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The author undertook a critical study on the Library and Information Science (LIS) education system in Sri Lanka during the 2004 – 2007 period and the purposes of the study were to raise awareness among policy makers, curriculum developers, LIS professionals, LIS teachers and employers of LIS professionals about problems affecting LIS education in Sri Lanka and to suggest a program of action for its strengthening. Three specific objectives were identified for the research; 1) To study the LIS education system in South Asia 2) To illustrate the state-of-the-art of the LIS education programmes in Sri Lanka. 3) To make recommendations for the future developments of the LIS education. Five Research Questions were formulated in order to achieve these objectives.

In order to achieve these objectives four Research Questions were formulated; 1) What is the nature of the current LIS education system in the other South Asian countries? 2) What is the profile of the contemporary LIS education programs in Sri Lanka? 3) What are the characteristics of the course contents, teaching, learning and assessment methods in the LIS education programs of Sri Lanka? and 4) What is the nature of the LIS teaching faculty and the other infrastructural facilities?

As part of the major study a critical evaluation of the quality of the LSI educational institutions and LIS as a discipline was made and this paper presents the findings of the institutional review. The paper contains six sections; section one and two presents the

introduction and the methodology while section three discusses the LIS education in Sri Lanka in detail. Section Four discusses the quality Assurance procedures in Sri Lanka while section five presents the findings. In section six conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Methodology

The main research used both quantitative as well as qualitative research methods to determine the current state of the art of LIS education in Sri Lanka and four methods; semi structured questionnaires, semi structured interviews, participatory observations of the researcher and review of literature were used to collect data.

Several sources like course-related documents, course co-ordinators, LIS teachers, students, policy makers who make decisions on recruitment and promotional schemes of the LIS work force and the practicing LIS professionals were contacted to gather information. Whenever the population was rather small or a comprehensive coverage was essential, the entire population was selected, but whenever the surveying of the total population was not possible a sample was selected using Proportional Stratified Random Sampling Method.

Because of the original nature of the data required, primary sources of all the LIS education programs conducted during the period considered for the study were reviewed. In addition published books, journal articles and other similar publications external to the institutions were also used.

To condense the volume of data thus collected coding and content analysis were used considering the semantic relationship of words. The nature of questions did not yield any subjective responses other than in a few instances and the small numbers of responses did not warrant any computerised method of analysis. In order to maintain the ethics of the research the identity of the individual institutions are not disclosed in this paper but will be provided to the

Sri Lankan LIS education policy makers whenever necessary for development planning.

LIS education in Sri Lanka

The empirical survey identified a total of 24 LIS education programs (Table 1) being conducted in Sri Lanka by 2007 by eight educational institutions divided between the university and non university sectors. At university level there are six types of organizations – the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) of University of Colombo, Department of LIS of University of Kelaniya (DLIS/UK), Faculties of Graduate Studies of Universities of Kelaniya (FGS/UK) and Jaffna (FGS/Jfn), Centre of Open and Distance Learning of University of Kelaniya (CODL) and External Degree Programs and Extension Services Unit (EDPESU) of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. At non-university level two types of organizations – Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA) and three of the seventeen National Colleges of Education (NCOEs) offer LIS education programs.

Types of programmes offered include six certificate programs, six diploma programs, three Bachelors programs, three PG Diploma programs, four Masters programs and two M.Phil/PhD programs (Table1). See Wijetunge (2009) for a detailed analysis of the programmes.

Table 1 – Current LIS education programs in Sri Lanka

Institute	Courses offered
1. National Institute of LIS, University of Colombo	1. Certificate in School Librarianship
	2. Certificate in Teacher Librarianship
	3. Certificate in Public Librarianship
	4. Mandatory Training Program for University Asst. Librarians (Certificate)
	5. Diploma in Teacher Librarianship
	6. Diploma in English for LIS Professionals
	7. Diploma in Library and

		Information Management
	8.	PG Diploma in LIS
	9.	PG Diploma in Teacher Librarianship
	10.	Master of LIS
	11.	Master of Teacher Librarianship
	12.	Master of Philosophy leading to PhD
2. Department of Library & Information Science (Dept. LIS), University of Kelaniya	13.	Higher Diploma in LIS
	14.	BA (General) – LIS as a subject for three years
	15.	BA (Special) – LIS as the specialization for
3. Faculty of Graduate Studies , University of Kelaniya	16.	MA (Library Science)
	17.	Master of Social Science (Library Science)
	18.	Doctor of Philosophy
4. Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Jaffna	19.	PG Diploma in LIS
5. Centre of Open and Distance Learning	20.	BA (General) (LIS as a subject)
6. External Degree Programs and Extension Services Unit, Sabaragamuwa	21.	Certificate in LIS
7. Professional Association	22.	Diploma in Library & Information Science
	23.	Certificate Course in Library Automation
8. National Colleges of Education (COE)	24.	National Diploma in Teaching (LIS as a major subject)

Sources: Course co-ordinators and brochures

Quality Assurance procedures in Sri Lanka

      Quality Assurance did not receive much attention of the Sri Lankan educators until the early 2000s, but an interest emerged from the university sector to address the quality assurance of the university education. Initiatives were taken by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Quality Assurance and Accreditation

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Council (QAAC) was established in 2005. QAAC of Sri Lanka (http://www.qaacouncil.lk/#) since then has introduced many quality assurance measures to increase the productivity and accountability of the university system and their initiatives are two pronged; the institutional review which evaluates the educational institutions and subject review which evaluates different disciplines. An institutional review is conducted along eight aspects;

1. Institutional goals and corporate planning
2. Financial resources and management
3. Research
4. Quality management and organisation
5. Quality Assurance
6. Learning resources and student support
7. External degree programs
8. University/industry/community/other extension activities. (QAAC 2002)

Subject Review is also conducted along eight aspects;

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
3. Quality of Students
4. The Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative
5. Postgraduate Studies
6. Peer Observation
7. Skills Development
8. Academic Guidance and Counseling (QAAC 2002)

Institutional Review involves small groups of academics trained in Quality Assurance procedures making an assessment based on visits/observations and self-prepared reports compiled by the institutions or the departments concerned. Each IR criterion will be given a judgment as Good, Satisfactory or Need to Improve. Subject Reviews are also carried out in the same manner. The review team will summarize its findings for each criterion noting strengths, good practice and weaknesses and will make a judgment as Good, Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Finally there will be one overall

judgment concerning either the university's Quality Assurance systems or the quality of provision in the department concerned (QAAC 2002).

Nevertheless it needs to be mentioned here that so far the Quality Assurance procedures of the QAAC are extended only to the public universities of Sri Lanka and the undergraduate programs of the universities receive priority over other types of programs. The services of the QAAC are not yet extended beyond the university sector.

Review of LIS educational institutions

Close examination point out that seven of the LIS educational institutions in Sri Lanka mentioned in Section Three do not come under the purview of the QAAC. The only institution which comes under the Quality Assurance plan is the Department of LIS which offers two bachelors programs. None of the other institutions offering LIS education have been subjected to any formal Quality Assurance assessment by the QAAC. In order to fill this void, the researcher attempted to review the LIS educational institutions using the Institutional and Subject Review criteria and this paper discusses the findings of the Institutional Review.

Institutional goals and corporate planning

Review of institutional documentation disclosed that clearly defined LIS education specific institutional vision, mission, goals, corporate planning and corresponding action plan is available only in one institute. Two institutions have LIS education specific mission statements. Five other institutions showed that their vision, mission or goals are not specifically LIS education oriented but covers many of their education programs in addition to LIS. Therefore they were counted as not having institutional goals and corporate planning because whatever available does not specifically promote LIS education but education at tertiary level in many disciplines.

Financial resources and management

Resource allocation procedures, executive responsibilities, and additional sources of funding were considered under this criterion. All the LIS educational institutions except the Professional Association could be identified as government while the latter as non-government as far as the financial management procedures are concerned.

Resource allocation procedures are not flexible in the government sector institutions although executive responsibilities are well structured and performed by personnel with professional qualifications in fund management. Supplementing the annual allocations made by the government is highly restricted according to the financial regulations. Any income earned by individual departments, faculties or units affiliated to universities have to be paid to the Consolidated Fund of the parent university. Utilising such earned funds is controlled by the parent university and the decisions cannot be made by the fund raisers. Colleges of Education are also subjected to such restrictions. Nevertheless affiliated institutions do have the authority to earn additional incomes and spend them for their development activities within the institution.

However the Professional Association which does not receive any government funds is not controlled by the government financial regulations. It totally depends on the earned income. A Treasurer is appointed from the membership (usually considering the ability to volunteer rather than the qualifications in fund-management). All financial decisions are made by the Administration and Finance Committee consisting of four members nominated by the Council and the Treasurer. There are no institutional or government restrictions to utilize the funds according to the decisions of the Council.

Based on these facts it can be concluded that the financial autonomy of the government sector institutions is restricted while in the Professional Association it is much more relaxed.

Research

Availability of an institutional research policy, a research centre or unit within the institute and provision of support for staff were considered under this criterion. There was no evidence in any of the LIS education institutions of a research policy or a research centre. In five of the institutions there are no permanent teachers therefore carrying out institutional research is not possible in them. Due to financial and administrative restrictions these institutions are not in a position to provide research grants to visiting teachers.

Only three institutions have any permanent teaching staff for whom research is a promotional requirement and these institutions provide infrastructure and other resources for research. Nevertheless any national level research other than the personal research conducted as partial fulfillment of postgraduate requirements, are yet to be conducted by these staff members.

The study did not indicate any contributions to LIS research from the Colleges of Education. Findings of the professional qualifications of the teaching staff indicated that the eight full time staff who teaches LIS at Colleges of Education do not have any educational qualifications in LIS although they are highly qualified in teacher training. This may be another reason in addition to the absence of a research policy, for the absence of LIS research in the Colleges of Education.

Quality management and organisation

The findings depicted that, in the university sector, the Senates and the Councils are the topmost monitoring and controlling bodies that act upon the recommendations of the Faculty Boards. In the case of affiliated institutions, decisions are taken by the Senate according to the recommendations of the Board of Management. External regulatory initiatives through the QAAC were started only recently and priority is given to the undergraduate programs as mentioned before. Only the Dept. of LIS qualifies for this at present and the other LIS educational institutions in the university sector are yet to be included in their programs. The control and monitoring of

the programs of the Professional Association is performed by the Council, which consists only of its members but there is no quality assurance by any external body. An important fact observed is the absence of accreditation of LIS education programs in Sri Lanka. Although it is usually done by the Professional Association, in Sri Lanka it functions as an LIS education provider and has not taken any initiative for accreditation.

Freedom of adopting quality assurance procedures

The effectiveness of the policies for quality assurance of academic standards of courses and awards, staffing and communication processes were studied and ascertained that the established practices of the parent bodies are adopted by the government institutions. There was no evidence of bureaucratic red-tapes in adopting the evaluation criteria set forth by the QAAC of Sri Lanka. However a strong institutional commitment and resources are required for this.

Learning infrastructure and student support

Three characteristics of the LIS educational institutes with regard to the infrastructural facilities were analysed here; having its own space to conduct classes, Library and other teaching/learning facilities, guidance and the support provided for students. Findings indicate that four institutions have their own space to conduct classes and that they are satisfied with what is available. Two institutions have claimed that they have their own space but not adequate to accommodate the student numbers. One institution does not need space because they do not conduct classes at all for students but only offer the registration through external mode*. The other institution does not have its own space but hires school classrooms at five regional centers on the days they conduct classes, but there are many inconveniences to both teachers and students because of this.

Three institutes have claimed that they have adequate library facilities while another three claims that the available library facilities are not adequate. One institute does not provide library facilities at all to the external students while another has their library

only in Colombo. Those who study at the other four regional centres have to visit Colombo to access this library. LIS teachers have commented that library facilities should be developed by the individual LIS educational institutes as follows. (The figure indicates the percentage of teachers which commented on that particular aspect.)

- Develop the LIS collections further - 18%
- Provide access to the libraries of the LIS educational institutes – 16% of the part time teachers have made this comment
- Develop a set of LIS teaching material for the common use of teachers – 3%
- Commence an SDI service for LIS teachers -6%

As far as the academic guidance is concerned, no formal methods of guidance or counseling were identified but informal academic support is provided in the three institutions where permanent teaching staff is available. Only one to one support is provided whenever the need arises in four institutions which depend entirely on visiting staff. In one institution where the external degree is offered there is no academic guidance because there is no interaction with the students for teaching or learning purposes.

External degree programs
A Bachelors degree program with LIS as one subject and a six months certificate program are offered in external mode by two units affiliated to two universities. For the Bachelors program, the unit or the parent university does not provide teaching, library and other resources or academic guidance therefore the quality of the student learning cannot be compared with the regular Bachelors programs in the university. However teaching and library facilities are offered to the students who follow the certificate program, therefore the academic environment is somewhat better in this program than that of the bachelor program.

University / industry / community / other extension activities
The activities of three institutions (the affiliated institution,

department and the Professional Association) indicated that they maintain relationships with the community by offering frequent workshops and training programs as well as support for library development but there was no such indication in other five institutions. The main reason for not having such relationships is the absence of permanent academic staff and lack of infrastructural facilities in these institutions.

Conclusion and recommendations

According to the findings under each institutional review criterion discussed in section 5.1 a judgment for each criterion is provided in Table 2. It illustrates that the quality of the LIS educational institutions in Sri Lanka is in a satisfactory condition but many initiatives can be implemented to improve the quality.

Table 2 - Institutional Review criteria

Criteria	Judgment
1 Publicly available Institutional goals and corporate planning	Need to improve
2 Flexibility of earning and managing financial resources	Need to improve
3 Research	Need to improve
4 Quality management and organisation	Satisfactory
5 Freedom of adopting quality assurance procedures	Satisfactory
6 Learning infrastructure and student support	Satisfactory
7 External degree programs	Satisfactory
8 University / industry / community / other extension activities	Satisfactory

Assurance of quality in the LIS educational institutes as well as for the LIS discipline itself is an essential requirement for the advancement of professional's education programmes. It is recommended that the Standing Committee for Library and Information Services (SCOLIS) established under the UGC for the

advancement of the discipline within the university sector, works in collaboration with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) of Sri Lanka for this purpose. A list of specific criteria for quality assurance in LIS education, based on the literature is provided (Table 4) which can be refined by SCOLIS to meet the requirements of the Sri Lankan needs. It is recommended that SCOLIS formulates and train a Review Team, in collaboration with the QAAC of Sri Lanka, to implement quality assurance processes in the LIS educational institutes.

Table - 3: Recommended Quality Assurance criteria for Sri Lankan LIS educational institutes.

1. **Mission**
2. **Goals and objectives and Corporate Plan**
3. **Curriculum**
Core curriculum,
Practicum
Transferable skills
Strengths of the curriculum
Regular review of curriculum
Rigour of the programme
Teaching / learning and assessment methods
Continuing education
4. **Faculty and staff**
Recruitment, reward and development of teaching staff
Size of faculty
Student faculty ratio
Visibility of the faculty,
Faculty publishing,
Number of support staff
5. **Students**
Admission policy and standards
Size of student body
Completion requirements
Satisfactory progression through the programme

Achievements that matches the learning outcomes
Extent of graduate and student feedback
Professional status of graduates,
Knowledge alumni

6. **Administration and financial support**
    Organisation
    Governance
    Planning and evaluation
    Prestige of the parent university,
    Grants for support,
    Leadership of the school,
    Leadership quotient of the Head / Co-ordinator
    Availability of doctoral programmes

7. **Research**
    Research goals and strategy
    Funding
    Staff support and opportunities
    Research infrastructure
    Monitoring and evaluation

8. **Quality Management and Administration**
    Quality policies and strategies
    Learning infrastructure
    Administrative support for quality assurance

9. **Quality Assurance**
    Regulation of awards and qualifications
    Programme/subject monitoring and review
    Feedback and verification mechanisms

10. **Institutional resource and facilities**
    Adequate budget/physical facilities,
    Rich library and other resources

11. **University /industry/community/ other extension activities**

Sources: Bookstein and Biggs 1987, Biggs and Bookstein 1988, IFLA 2000 and Mulvaney 1992 and 1993 and CVCD & UGC 2002

Note
    ***Domestic public universities in Sri Lanka can accommodate only about 14% of those who are eligible for university education in a given year (UGC 2005). A large number of students therefore seek learning opportunities as external students. These external students are not formally taught or provided with library and other facilities within a university. For a nominal fee they are provided with course syllabi and lists of recommended texts. Annual end of academic year examinations are held and according to the established rules and regulations students can obtain a degree after three or four years if they satisfy the examination requirements

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