

Jamaludin, A., Hussin, N., & Mokhtar, W. N. H. W. (2006). Library and information career in Malaysia: Aspirations of educators and the reality of the industry. In C. Khoo, D. Singh & A.S. Chaudhry (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education & Practice 2006 (A-LIEP 2006)*, Singapore, 3-6 April 2006 (pp. 423-426). Singapore: School of Communication & Information, Nanyang Technological University.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CAREER IN MALAYSIA: ASPIRATIONS OF EDUCATORS AND THE REALITY OF THE INDUSTRY

ADNAN JAMALUDIN, NORHAYATI HUSSIN &
WAN NOR HALIZA WAN MOKHTAR

*Faculty of Information Management
Kampus Puncak Perdana
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
40150 Shah Alam, Selangor
Malaysia*

E-mail: adnanj@salam.uitm.edu.my, yatihussin@gmail.com, whaliza@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper discusses the aspirations of library and information science (LIS) educators particularly in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM. The Faculty of Information Management is the main provider of manpower needs for the library and information science profession in the country. The focus of the discussions is on the development that has taken shape in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM particularly on the undergraduate library and information science programs. Within that premise, a comparison is made between the aspirations of LIS educators and the reality of the LIS industry particularly in the public sector in the country.

Background Development

Library education in Malaysia dates back as early as 1955 with the formation of Malayan Library Group (MLG) (Lim, 1970). Because there were no formal library education programs established at that time, MLG organized classes in librarianship to fill the void and to enhance the library and information services in Malaya (Kaba, 2001). The formal education in library and information science only came into being in the year of 1968 when MARA Institute of Technology which is now known as University Teknologi MARA introduced a professional course in librarianship leading to the Library Association (United Kingdom) examination and accreditation. Then in 1973, with the rationale to inject local content in the training of library and information professionals, a new curriculum for a three-year course for a Diploma in Library Science was introduced. These developments were followed by other library and information science (LIS) programs, particularly at the postgraduate levels, established at other public universities in Malaysia. To date, there are four public universities in Malaysia offering library and information science related education namely Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), University Malaya (UM), International Islamic University (IIUM), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Of these four, UiTM could be considered very dominant in the training of the LIS professionals that ranges from the diploma to undergraduate, master, and the doctoral degrees. This diversity of programs in UiTM is the result of the optimistic views and the aspirations of the educators towards the development of the profession in the country.

This paper discusses the aspirations of library and information science educators particularly in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM. The Faculty of Information Management is the main provider of manpower needs to the library and information science profession in the country. The focus of the discussions is on the development that has taken shape in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM particularly on the undergraduate library and information science programs. Within that premise, a comparison is made between the aspirations of the LIS educators and the reality of the LIS industry particularly in the private sector in the country for an attempt to analyze whether the aspirations and the reality are in tandem.

Aspirations of Library and Information Science Educators

Library and Information Science (LIS) educators particularly in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM aspired that the profession of library and information science would progress according to the developments that are taking shape in the country. This is because the developments are very much related to information and knowledge resources. The establishment of Multimedia Super Corridor, the Vision 2020, and the coming of the knowledge economy, in a way have motivated LIS educators to play their roles towards these developments. As a result of their aspirations, a number of developments

have taken place in the Faculty of Information Management in relation to the education and training of LIS professionals. Among the most significant developments are:

- Establishment of new specialized undergraduate programs
- Changing of the name of the faculty
- Expansion of the academic staff
- The use of two-tier system of education and training

Establishment of new specialized undergraduate programs

In the effort to connect to the development, the faculty therefore, developed a series of library and information science related programs with the hope to provide formal education and training that later would fill the void for the new areas of specialization needed by the developments. In that context, three new specialized undergraduate programs were introduced apart from revamping the dominant library science program that has long been in existence in the Faculty of Information Management. The revamped Library Science program has been given a new name i.e. Library and Information Management (LIM) while the three new undergraduate programs are (Malaysia. Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA 1998):

- Information Systems Management (ISM)
- Records Management (RM)
- Information Resource Center Management (IRCM)

Information Systems Management (ISM) is an undergraduate program that focuses on the management and utilization of information systems in all types and sizes of organizations. Considering information systems and ICT have proliferated into libraries and information centers, new job opportunities with new job designations would be created and this Information Systems Management program would suit these new job titles.

Records Management (RM) is a program that focuses on the training of records and archives professionals. This program prepares the undergraduate students with the skills and knowledge in managing printed and electronic records as well as archival materials. This professional program is inline with the development of electronic government as one of the flagships in the Multimedia Super Corridor of Malaysia.

Information Resource Center Management (IRCM) is a program that focuses on the training of teacher librarians. The development of smart schools as one of the flagships in the Multimedia Super Corridor and the stress on resourced-based teaching and learning in schools requires a qualified teacher librarian to support the learning and teaching activities.

Library and Information Management (LIM) is a program that focuses on the training of future librarians that are not only equipped with basic skills and knowledge of library and information work but also with the skills to handle the new and up-to-date technologies that could be of benefits to the provision of library and information services for the development of the country.

Changing of the name of the Faculty

The faculty has undergone many changes to its name. It started as the School of Library Science in 1973 and later changed to School of Library and Information Science in 1980. The name of the faculty was again changed to Faculty of Information Studies and finally changed to Faculty of Information Management. The continuous changes to the faculty name reflect the aspiration of the LIS educators to highlight the importance and relevance of the LIS education to the current developments in the country. Apart from that, the move to finally name it as Faculty of Information Management is to accommodate all the elements of information field specifically in the business world and to reflect the real core business of the profession i.e. managing information regardless the nature of the business and not tied to the building such as the library.

Expansion of the Academic Staff

With the introduction of new academic programs in the faculty, additional academic staff has been recruited to fulfill the needs. Apart from the recruitment of new academic staff from the Young Lecturers Scheme (YLS) as the main source of recruitment in the faculty, the faculty has also recruited quite a significant number of academic staff from various basic disciplines such as law, business, science and technology, and social science and humanities with a post graduate degree in library and information science.

The use of two-tier system education and training

The two-tier academic system that is widely practiced in the UiTM education system has also impacted the development of new undergraduate programs. The two-tier system requires the faculty to offer a terminal diploma program in the field of library and information science. This requirement has led to the introduction of a generic stand-alone diploma program called Diploma in Information Management. The elements of library, archives, systems, and resource center are introduced in this program. The purpose of this diploma program supplies manpower at the semi-professional level for the library and information science market in the country. However, if the graduates of this diploma choose to pursue their bachelor degrees in library and information science they would only need another two years to complete the degree in any of the four specializations offered in the faculty.

Reality of the Library and Information Science Industry

Albeit the advancement in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM, the reality of the industry is quite leisurely particularly in the public sector. This in a way has stunted the progress of the profession as aspired to by LIS educators. The following discussions relate to the reality of the industry that has direct or indirect impact on the development of LIS profession in the country as a whole.

Repositioning of National Library under the new Ministry

The latest development in the industry is the repositioning of the National Library under the Ministry of Culture, Art and Heritage. Prior to this repositioning, National Library was placed under the responsibility of Ministry of Education. Whether this new development would be more relevant and beneficial to the profession of LIS has yet to be seen. As the core business of the profession is information and knowledge, the relevance of the new ministry to the profession is quite difficult to rationalize. Perhaps the word national (National Library) has been misinterpreted to be equivalent to culture or art or worst still heritage because it has been thought to have historical value.

Recognition of LIS Profession

As much as information and knowledge have economic value, librarians in the country are categorized in the social (S) category under the Public Service Scheme of Malaysia. Other professions that are similarly categorized are the Islamic Affairs Officer, Archive Officer, Curator, Social Development Officer, Youth and Sports Officer, Industrial Relation Officer, and Counselor (Malaysia. Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam, 2003). Perhaps, LIS profession is perceived more of a social work rather than a profession that relates to knowledge that could generate economic value to the development of the country.

Non-Existence of Record Manager in Public Sector

With the introduction of electronic government within the Multi Media Super Corridor setup, certainly electronic record management is deemed one of the most crucial factors in ensuring the success of the electronic government initiative. The record management program introduced by the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM should be able to fill the void of records management professionals in the country. But at present, the job scheme for record managers in public sector is still non-existence. Graduates trained in record management at this time still could not be employed as record managers in the public sector. Presently, the public sector of Malaysia is without record managers to manage the records that are generated daily.

Generic Job Designation

After 50 years of existence, the profession of library and information science is still carrying the unchanged generic designation without any expansion or addition to it. This may be argued that "what's in the name" but any expansion or addition to the job designation connotes new responsibility, skills, and knowledge or rather new development to the profession. Librarians should not only be perceived as individuals working in a building called library that are filled with books and other printed materials. There have been enormous developments in the library particularly in relation to the proliferation of information and communication technology (ICT) which librarians are skillful in managing and utilizing. Therefore, the time has come for this new skills and capabilities to be made known to the public

through new job designations such as Systems Librarian, Automation Librarian, or rather Web Librarian. With these developments, not only the profession will be viewed as up-to-date but also will be in tandem with the specialization in education and training of future librarians as aspired by the LIS educators. Of course this will be an up hill task to convince the public sector to create a new scheme for new job designations for the LIS profession in the country. But statistics from 2001 to 2005 showed that graduates of various specializations related to LIS fields produced by the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM were only employed under one generic job designation i.e. Librarians in the public sector.

Teacher Librarians

Another area of library and information profession that has not fully developed in the industry is the school library. The Information Resource Center Management (IRCM) program introduced by the Faculty of Information Management intends to provide the needs for the manpower for school libraries in the country to manage the school libraries full time. But at present, graduates of this program still could not be accepted into the national education system to enable them to be employed as full time librarian in schools. Most school libraries in the country are at present managed by non-fulltime personnel who are teachers professionally and not librarians (Raja Abdullah & Saidina Omar, 2003). The development of smart schools as one of the flagships in the Multimedia Super Corridor surely relies on a full-time librarian to provide professional library services and resourced-based learning approach. The smart schools in the country need to be supported by proper libraries and managed by full-fledged librarians in order to benefit the schools.

Professional Body

The professional body for the library and information science profession in the country is the Librarians Association of Malaysia, formerly known as Library Association of Malaysia. The change from “library” to “librarians” could be interpreted as shifting of focus of the professional body towards the human aspects of the profession rather than the infrastructure. As a professional body, it has executed its utmost mission to “the creation of an information-rich knowledge-based civil society, through the promotion of information equity, lifelong and independent learning, and enhancement of library and information professionals” (Persatuan Pustakawan Malaysia, 2005). But as a professional body, it can play many more roles to improve the general perception and recognition of library and information science professionals in the country, similar to the roles played by other professional body of other professions in the country.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to briefly highlight and compare the aspirations of the library and information science educators with the development of library and information science industry in the country. The library and information science profession has its significance in supporting the progress of the country towards achieving a developed nation. But aspirations and reality need to be in harmony as much as educators and practitioners need to collaborate for the betterment of library and information science profession.

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