BEYOND THE BOOK STACKS:
THE ROAD MAP OF THE PHILIPPINE LIBRARY PROFESSION

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Abstract

Filipino professionals must brace themselves for the implementation of the ASEAN mutual agreement on borderless delivery of goods and services among member countries in 2015. As an initial step towards global competitiveness, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) tasked each of the forty six (46) Professional Regulatory Boards to prepare Road maps for their respective professions. The Road map embodies the vision and mission of each profession, the status and current roles of professionals, the major issues and challenges, and the action agenda to overcome the challenges.

Introduction

The Philippines' Department of Labor and Employment is paving the way towards the empowerment of Filipino professionals for global competitiveness. This is in compliance with the agreement among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member countries to implement "borderless delivery of goods and services" within the region during the launch of the Asian Economic Community (AEC) in late 2015. Professional services is one sector covered by this agreement; hence the formulation of policies and programs to improve the quality of professionals has become very urgent. As a starting point, the Professional Regulation Commission of the Philippines tasked the 46 Professional Regulatory Boards (PRBs) under its umbrella to formulate a road map for every profession.

The Professional Board for Librarians (BFL 2010-2013) accepted this challenge and came up with a Road Map of Philippine Librarianship. The Road Map was presented to PRC Management and the other PRBs, and to librarians in various parts of the country, by no less than the former BFL Chair, Prof. Corazon M. Nera.

Objectives of the Road Map

Specifically, the road map aims to accomplish these objectives:

1. To restate the mission and vision of libraries where library and information professionals practise their expertise;

2. To seek out the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the challenges faced by librarians in the country; and

3. To formulate policies and action plans that will help address the challenges and problems of the profession

The road map is expected to showcase the status, roles and challenges faced by librarians and to formulate policies, strategies, and action programs geared toward addressing issues and problems of the library profession. Mindful construction of a road map will benefit library practice and lead professionals to follow the right path towards meeting the vision of librarianship, i.e., producing world-class librarians.

Methodology

Statistical data from the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Department of Education (DepEd), and the Department of the interior and Local Government (DILG) were searched and analyzed to determine the status and the major challenges faced by librarians in the digital age.

Part of the BFL's mandate is to pursue ocular visits to a random selection of libraries all over the country. The objectives are to check whether librarians are up to their task of being information providers and to ensure compliance with library standards and national laws. During the visits, focused face-to-face interviews with heads of libraries or responsible library staff were conducted to gather reliable data about the state of libraries in the country and the roles assumed by the library professional. The number of libraries visited (179) in 2012-2013 was limited by budgetary and time constraints but this was enough to see the true picture of the status of librarianship and the demand for librarians in the Philippines. To ensure that the visiting team sees the real picture of local libraries, all the visits were conducted without prior notice.

The Road Map of the Library Profession

The Vision and Mission of Libraries

The vision of libraries as embodied in the Road Map is:

"As a center of intense intellectual inquiry, the library is envisioned to be the most dynamic learning environment in the world."

To achieve this vision, the librarian ensures that:

◦ collections are relevant and up-to-date, diverse in content and format, of the highest quality, and can be accessed instantly and remotely;

◦ through the maximum utilization of modern information technologies, linking

clients with information is made easier and in a timely manner;

- using marketing strategies, target clients are made aware of the resources available for their use and are encouraged to make use of these;

- to fulfill the requirements of the new breed of users, the library's physical and virtual spaces are aligned to clients' needs and altered for instant access to information;

- institutional output and relevant information in all formats is preserved for the use of future generations.

This vision is explicit in Section 2 of Republic Act 9246 (Philippines. Republic Act 9246):

"The State recognizes the essential role of librarianship as a profession in developing the intellectual capacity of the citizenry thus making library service a regular component for national development. … … It shall through honest, effective and credible licensure examination and regulatory measures, undertake programs and activities that would promote and nurture the professional growth and well-being of competent, virtuous, productive and well-rounded librarians whose standards of practice and service shall be characterized by excellence, quality, and geared towards world-class global competitiveness."

The library's mission is to serve as a gateway to global information, enabling direct and remote access to information resources in a variety of formats. The library is a dynamic instrument in imparting knowledge to users, evolving to meet the changing needs of its diverse community of users in the pursuit of institutional mission, values, and vision.

The New Roles of Librarians

Librarians are steering libraries towards the fulfillment of the urgent and complex mission of sharing knowledge with users. They create and implement programs and provide services that promote successful lifelong learning strategies. Figure 1 shows the many roles that librarians assume in modern society.
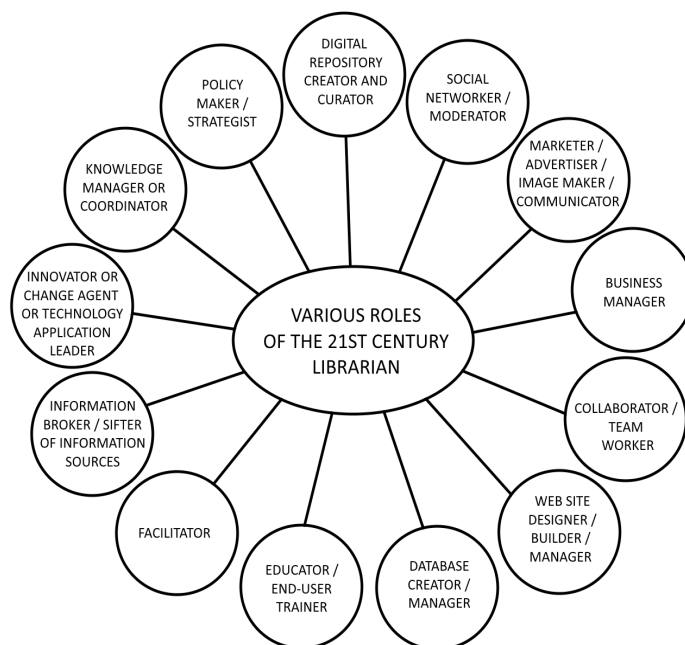
Figure 1. Various roles assumed by Librarians in the digital age

These and many more put a toll on the librarian's knowledge and expertise.

Current Status and the Challenges

Along with the diverse roles, there are many "brick walls" that librarians need to hurdle. As the Philippines metamorphosed into a technology-driven society, librarians are facing the following major challenges (Ramos, 2013):

⚬ The fight for status - librarianship is one of the most downgraded professions in the country;

⚬ Coping with continuing advances in information technology as evident in the increasing number of more sophisticated information storage and retrieval applications or library automation software;

⚬ Automation of the information infrastructure (tablet computers, e-book readers, mobile phones), hence faster and better modes of or multimedia dissemination of information;

⚬ Geometric increase in the volume of information in digital and other formats;

⚬ Greater access to a wider range of information sources via the WWW as provided by better Internet connectivity in libraries and homes;

⚬ More sophisticated information-seeking behavior and expectations of information seekers (the millennials and gen-Z users);

⚬ Proactive collaboration and the increasing popularization and deepening of

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computer and communications networks;

- ◦ Use of social media in knowledge management;

- ◦ Increase in the number of libraries needing licensed librarians.

The Fight for Status and Relevance

In spite of the fact that librarians are now using technology in their everyday routines, there still exist the stereotype of long ago: that library and information work does not require a four-year degree course. The impression that anyone can do the tasks of a librarian is still prevalent in the country. In the course of BFL visits, there are some unlicensed professionals who are assuming the tasks of librarians which create a negative impact on the image of the profession. Failure of these people to deliver what clients need leads to the general impression that librarians are no longer relevant.

The image of librarians is improving but this is taking place at a very slow pace (Kneale, 2002). Advances in information technology (IT) and the advent of the World Wide Web created the wrong notion that the web is a good substitute for the library. Less people are using the library. Librarians have to work hard to create value for the library. The low recognition accorded to the profession is evident in many libraries visited by the BFL. In academic libraries, many professionals do not enjoy the same status as faculty members in terms of position and salaries (Nera, 2012-2013). Above all these, there is a need to justify a library's existence - to create value and to show how the library contributes to the overall mission of the organization.

The Need to Upgrade Skills and Competence

Library automation and the ever-increasing volume of information resources available via the WWW requires advanced computer and Internet-searching skills in addition to basic professional knowledge. Clients want information available to them, anytime, anywhere. Librarians must be able to cater to the needs of the computer-savvy users lest they be replaced by Google or other search engines.

One of the major challenges embodied in the road map is the need to improve the professional and technical competencies of the librarian. More demands are placed on librarians by the more sophisticated breed of information seekers. A computer-illiterate librarian has no place in the digital age. Complex library tasks dictate that IT skills be improved to reach the same level, if not higher than that of the users. Resistance to change is one barrier that hampers the profession to a large extent. Some librarians, especially those working in the provinces, are still afraid to use computers. More so, there are many more who are not keen on pursuing continuous professional development.

The Huge Volume and High Costs of Electronic Resources

The high costs of electronic resources and the diminishing financial resources are major deterrents to the performance of a librarian's job. These are deterrents that are beyond one's control. Whenever an institution imposes budgetary cuts, it is normally the library that suffers

the biggest brunt. With the high demand for digital resources, the current budget can no longer cope. The poor librarian is burdened with stretching existing budgets to the limit.

The Increasing Demand for and the Shortage of Licensed Librarians

Librarians are more in demand as the huge volume of information provided by the Internet requires a professional to link the right resources with researchers. The increasing demand for librarians is evident in listservs, online discussion groups, job advertisements, and e-mail announcements.

Currently there are 7,1691 names in the PRC's roster of professional librarians. The actual number of active librarians is less than this because the retired, deceased, and those who moved to other professions were not removed from the list. The average passing percentage in the LLE from 2004 to 2013 is only 33.1% out of an average 811 examinees for the same period (Ramos, 2012). With this low passing rate, it is impossible for the supply to cope with the demand.

Academic Institutions Need 61,000+ Librarians

Libraries are essential components of educational institutions at all levels. They supplement classroom instruction and therefore, broaden the horizons of learners by exposing them to information resources, other than textbooks. Research studies show that a well-equipped library, managed by a professional librarian makes a positive impact on student performance (International Association of School Librarianship, 2008; Francis, D.H., 2010). The value of libraries to students has been demonstrated in many research studies. The school normally relies on libraries to support the school curriculum and the students' development. Access to information resources provided by libraries have encouraged motivation to learn, higher placement scores and higher graduation rates (New York Comprehensive Center, 2011)

The value of libraries in higher education institutions is clearly shown in a compilation of research results done by Megan Oakleaf for the Association of College and Research Libraries (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010). The positive impact of academic libraries have been demonstrated in the following areas: the choice of colleges and universities ; support of classroom instruction resulting in improved student retention and graduation rates; the students' ability to do well in internships; higher scores in admission and achievement tests; overall institutional reputation and prestige; facilitation of the accreditation process; and assistance in staff professional development.

These values are evident only in libraries managed by qualified librarians in big universities and colleges in the country,. All institutions of learning should, therefore, have an effective library, run by licensed librarians. Table 1 shows that there are 61,581 schools and institutions of higher learning in the Philippines.

Type of Educational Institution	Private	Public	Total
Elementary Schools	7,745	38,659	46,404
Secondary Schools	5,130	7,748	12,878
Higher Education institutions	1,643	656	2,299
Total	14, 518	47,063	61,581

Table 1 . No. of Schools and Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines (Source: Philippines. Dept. of Education, 2013; Philippines. Commission on Higher Education, 2013)

For academic libraries, the standard is one (1) librarian for every five hundred (500) students. Hence, for academic libraries alone, the current number of licensed librarians, is not enough

Local Government Units (LGUs) need 42,000+ Librarians

There is an enabling law that requires LGUs to establish and maintain libraries for public use. Republic Act no. 774 "An Act providing for the establishment of congressional, city and municipal libraries and barangay reading centers throughout the Philippines, appropriating the necessary funds therefore and for other purposes" was enacted on June 17, 1994. Figures in Table 2 show that there are 42,028 local government units in the country that need to establish libraries or reading centers.

Number of Provinces, Cities, Municipalities and Barangays by Region as of March 31, 2014

REGION	PROVINCE	CITIES	MUNICIPALITIES	BARANGAYS
NCR		16	1	1,706
I	4	9	116	3,265
II	5	4	89	2,311
III	7	14	116	3,102
IV-A	5	18	124	4,011
IV-B	5	2	71	1,458
V	6	7	107	3,471
VI	6	16	117	4,051
VII	4	16	116	3,003
VIII	6	7	136	4,390
IX	3	5	67	1,904
X	5	9	84	2,022
XI	5	6	43	1,162
XII	4	5	45	1,195
XIII (CARAGA)	5	6	67	1,311
CAR	6	2	75	1,176
ARMM	5	2	116	2,490
TOTAL	**81**	**144**	**1,490**	**42,028**

Source: NSCB

Table 2. Number of Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines (Philippines. Dept. of Interior and Local Government, 2014)

Adding the totals from Tables 1 and 2 would result in 103,609 institutions needing at least one licensed librarians. Academic institutions with more than 1,000 students need more

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licensed librarians.

The Demand for Librarians in Private Corporations

Based on the 2012 Census of Philippine business and industries there are 36,699 business establishments in the country. Assuming that only the top 1,000 corporations would establish libraries, still this number is big enough to add to the gap between the existing supply and demand for licensed librarians.

More Evidences of the Shortage of Librarians

Librarians belonging to the baby boomer generation have retired 2011 onwards and there are not enough left to fill in the vacated positions. Various listservs and social networks in the Philippines show frequent postings of vacant librarian positions in various institutions.

The urgent need for qualified librarians was echoed by Heads of academic and other institutions visited by the BFL. Some of them even asked for help from the BFL in recruiting licensed librarians for their institutions. Although the visits were limited to libraries selected at random from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, still the shortage is very obvious. Out of 179 libraries visited in 2012-2013, 50% or 89 public, school, or academic libraries either do not have licensed librarians or do not have enough licensed librarians to cater to the needs of staff and students. This translates to more than one hundred (100) licensed librarians to be able to comply with established standards. More would be added to this figure had more libraries been visited..

The Quality of Higher Education for Library and Information Science Professionals

The BFL conducted a research on the factors that could have an impact on performance in the LLE (Ramos, 2013). A study of statistical data pertaining to such factors as age, gender, types of examinees (repeaters or first timers), academic degrees, dates of graduation, and educational institutions revealed that all the factors except educational institutions have no direct effect on the number of LLE passers. Of the 121 academic institutions offering degree courses in library and information science, 61% had no passers and only 19 of these achieved a passing percentage of 50% or more (Ramos, 2012). To increase the supply of licensed librarians there is a need to examine the BLIS and the MLIS curricula, the qualifications of faculty and the teaching facilities in these academic institutions.

The Proposed Strategies to Overcome Challenges

The following figures, as presented in the Road Map, show the possible strategies that could offset the challenges faced by the profession.
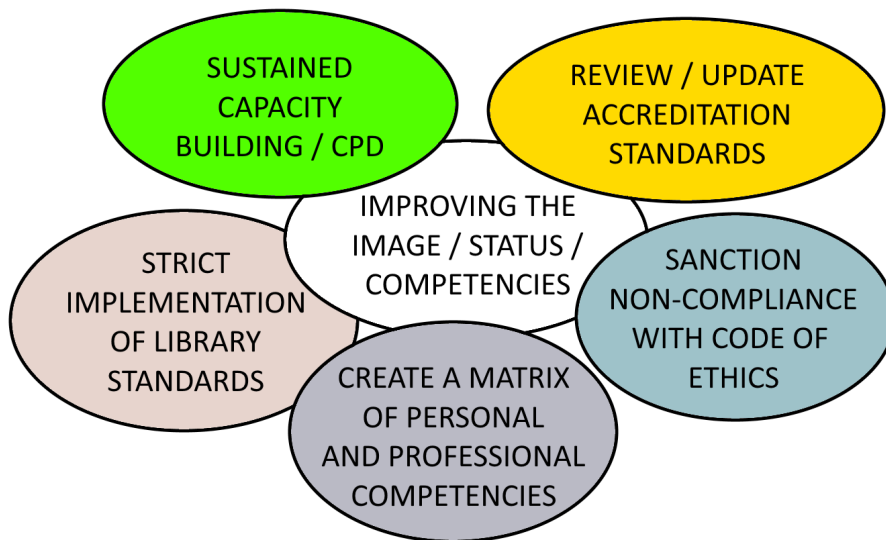
Strategy 1. Addressing the Challenge of Improving the Image/Status/Competencies

Figure 2. Strategies to address the challenge of improving the image, status, and competencies of LIS professionals

Sustained Capacity Building Through Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

As librarians are challenged to hone their knowledge, skills, and competencies to become world-class professionals, education should not stop after earning a college degree. CPD must be pursued to align their abilities with changes in IT and the more sophisticated needs of users. There are many opportunities to do this in the Philippines as local library associations and other providers are actively conducting professional development for LIS professionals.

Revision of Accreditation Standards, Library Standards and Strict Implementation

The active involvement of local accreditation agencies is a major boost to the image of librarians. However, there is a need for these agencies to use identical standards for evaluation. Sometimes, one accreditation agency has different requirements from the others. The BFL has finished revising standards for special libraries. Through the initiative of the National Library, those for public libraries are already in place. Updating/revising of standards for school and higher education institution libraries should follow suit. It is not enough that library standards have been updated and revised, strict implementation must be observed. The library visits conducted by the BFL constitute a good avenue for checking adherence to standards.

Development of a Matrix of Professional and Personal Competencies

For the ASEAN's free flow of professionals to be successful, the matrix of professional and personal competencies for each profession must be the same regardless of country of origin. The BFL has convened a group of eminent librarians to come up with a set of

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professional and personal competencies to be adopted in the country. This is now in the hands of the current BFL, awaiting endorsement. Again, strict implementation is very urgent. It would also benefit the profession if each librarian could do a self-check to determine strong and weak points and to work on improvement of the latter.

Stricter Sanctions on Erring Librarians

Although there are only a few cases of librarians' violation of the law or the Code of Ethics for Librarians, still all professionals should be vigilant in ensuring that erring librarians are properly disciplined or sued in court. This is the only way to safeguard the reputation of librarians. The BFL is the agency in charge of this but the Board cannot act unless formal complaints are lodged against the violators.

Strategy 2. Addressing the Challenge of Upgrading the Skills and Competencies of Librarians

CPD is the effective means to upgrade the skills and competencies of librarians. Fulfilling the needs of computer-savvy clients require high level IT skills. This challenge when hurdled will also redound to improving the image of librarians. PRC is planning to restore the earlier requirement for a minimum number of CPD credit units per year for the renewal of librarians' licenses.

On the other hand, CPD providers should be more discriminatory in selecting the topics and resource persons for the training opportunities that they offer. Duplication of topics covered should be down to a minimum.

The matrix of personal and professional competencies mentioned earlier would also effectively deal with this challenge.

Strategy 3. Dealing with the Huge Volume and High Costs of Electronic Resources

High costs may be offset through networking or collaboration with other librarians. The two challenges mentioned above are not within the capability of librarians to resolve. But these can be mitigated if the librarian would use professional knowledge in sifting information available via the WWW. The open access movement offers big opportunities for libraries with small budgets. Searching, evaluation, linking or downloading of freely available electronic resources should be part of the daily routine. Costs may be offset through networking or collaboration with other librarians.
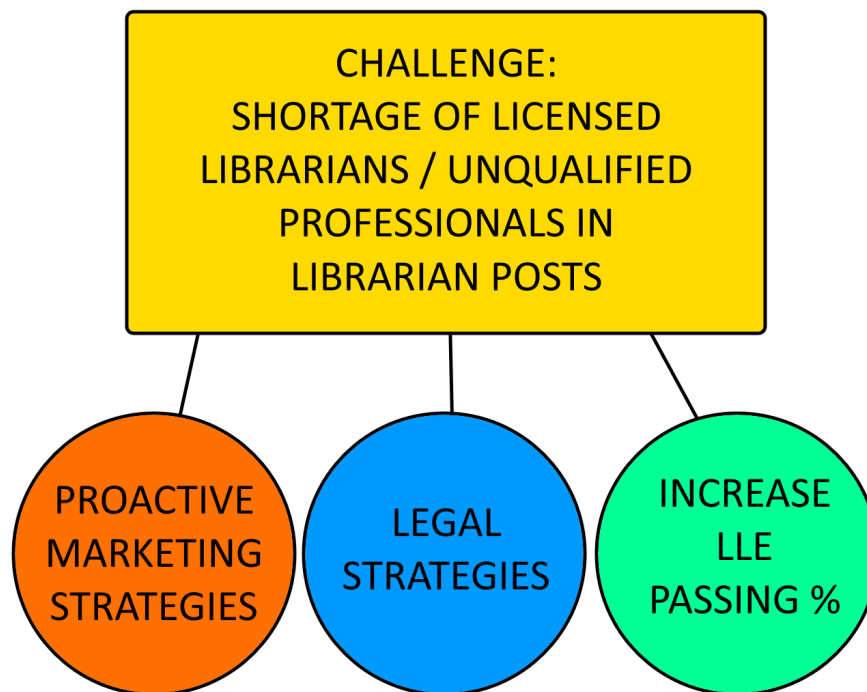
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Strategy 4. Dealing with the Short Supply of Licensed Librarians

Figure 3. Strategies to Remedy the Shortage of Licensed Librarians

Proactive Marketing of the Profession

The BFL considers the current shortage of licensed librarians as the most critical among the many challenges. More high school graduates should be encouraged to take up LIS as a career. Proactive marketing should be undertaken jointly by the BFL, the various library associations, the Commission on Higher Education as well as higher education institutions offering LIS degrees. Career orientations should be conducted more often and in the right venues.

Sustained Efforts to Increase the LLE Passing Percentage

The current average passing rate of 30+% in the LLE needs to increase so that the country would have enough librarians to fill in the vacant positions all over the country. This, however, is not an easy task. The LLE is an established standard to measure the competence of professionals in fulfilling the tasks of information sharing and if the professional fails, it means he lacks the qualifications needed for the job.

The Need for Legal Strategies

The professionalization of librarians in the country, as embodied in Republic Act 6966 and later amended by RA 9246, ensures that non-professionals cannot assume the position of librarians. Certain sections of the law need to be amended to address the short supply of

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librarians. For example, the requirement limiting qualified examinees to BLIS and MLIS degree holders only is a deterrent to increasing the number of examinees. In the past, BSE and other degree holders, with majors in LIS, who have earned at least 18 units of LIS subjects were allowed to take the LLE and disallowing them decreased the number of examinees to a large extent. Another provision of the law that needs to be amended is the requirement for non-passers to retake the examinations in all subjects regardless of whether he passed in other subjects. It would benefit the profession to have the non-passer retake the examination only in subjects where he failed, but he should have passing marks in at least 3 of the 6 subjects covered by the examination.

Republic Act no. 7743, " An Act providing for the establishment of congressional, city and municipal libraries and barangay reading centers throughout the Philippines, appropriating the necessary funds therefore and for other purposes" is another opportunity to attract more professionals to take up LIS. One hurdle though is the lack of plantilla positions for librarians in local government units. While the law clearly recognizes the need to have libraries in all local government units (LGUs), it should be more explicit in the creation of plantilla positions for librarians.

Legal instruments for school, higher education institutions, and special libraries should also be enacted. There is a need to lobby for this.

Strategy 5. Improving the Quality of Library Education

There are more than 100 universities and colleges offering LIS degrees. However, not all of them are producing quality graduates who can easily hurdle the LLE. Only 9 institutions showed consistently high passing rates through the years (Ramos, 2013). The strategies proposed below are self-explanatory.
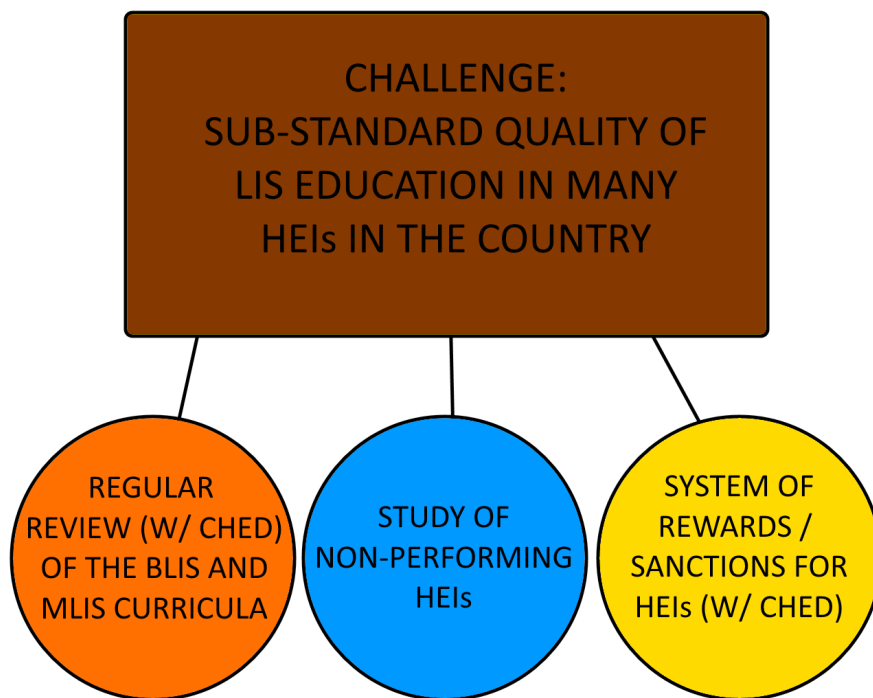
Figure 4. Strategies to Address the Sub-Standard Quality of Philippine Library Education

A revised version of the BLIS and MLIS curricula has been done by the Technical Committee on Library and Information Science of CHED. This will be implemented soon after fine-tuning. Researches need to focus on HEIs that do not produce passers in the LLE. A system of rewards and sanctions needs to be imposed by CHED for performing and non-performing higher institutions of learning. The BFL has submitted a list of institutions that should stop offering LIS degrees on account of their graduates' poor or zero performance in the LLE.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The BFL Road Map is intended to lay down the right path for LIS professionals to tread on. The challenges and the proposed strategies have been examined at length. The last part of the Road Map embodies pathways leading to success of the profession. These are presented in tabular form along with the time line and the entities responsible.

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Strategies	Time line	Responsibility
1. Promote Capacity Building activities/Make CPD Mandatory	2012 and continuing	BFL, APO, Congress, CPD providers
2. Update standards	2012-2013	BFL, APO, Accrediting Agencies
3. Create a matrix of personal and professional competencies	2012-2013	BFL, APO, other national library associations
4. Active Marketing of the profession	2012 and continuing	BFL, HEIs, APO, and other national library associations
5. Improve LLE passing percentage	2012-2015	BFL
6. Regular Review of BLIS and MLIS curricula	2012-continuing	BFL & CHED
7. Conduct of research projects	2012 and continuing	BFL
8. Legal strategies	2012 and continuing	BFL, APO, Other national associations for lobbying; Congress for amendment and enactment

Table 3. The Various Pathways to Success, the Timeline and the Bodies Responsible

Essentially, the Road Map has prioritized goals, identified challenges, and laid down possible strategies to put Filipino librarians at par with librarians from other countries. The initial implementation of the action plan started in 2012 with full implementation set in 2015 in time for the effectivity of the "borderless exchange of goods and services" within and beyond the ASEAN region. Evaluation of results after each activity would be helpful. Every LIS professional is expected to contribute to the accomplishment of the mission and vision presented in the road map. Positive results are expected with proactive collaboration among the key players tasked to be responsible for each pathway to success.

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