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## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS TO PHILIPPINE LIS EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*The paper presents the various factors that shape LIS education in the Philippines specific to faculty, curriculum, students, and accreditation. It shows that the problems currently encountered by LIS schools are not without solution and some of these are slowly being implemented by the stakeholders to include LIS educators, CHED TC-LIS, BFL, PATLS, and CODHLIS.*

**Keywords:** education for library and information science, education for librarianship, Philippines

### **Introduction**

Philippine library and information science (LIS) education started in 1914 at the University of the Philippines (UP) “to meet the needs arising from the rapid growth of libraries in the country, and to improve the training of librarians” (Versoza, 1968, p. 1). While there was training for librarians even before 1914, it was felt that these were not enough. Therefore, the education of librarians was established under the College of Liberal Arts with Dr. James Robertson and Mary Polk as pioneering teachers. From a three-year program, it became a four-year program in 1916. In 1918, a law was passed that created scholarships for those who have finished library science training from the UP, to pursue advanced training in the United States (US). From 1918 to 1923, students were sent to the US to complete such training and from them, four became faculty members of the library teaching staff of UP (Versoza, 1968). In 1932, the University of Santo Tomas began offering library science courses under the College of Education and soon thereafter, other private schools followed suit (Vallejo, 1990).

In 1961, a separate degree granting unit was established in the University of the Philippines,

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that of the Institute of Library Science which initially offered Bachelor of Library Science (Vallejo, 1990). The first master's program was offered in 1962 at the UP Institute of Library Science, which is a separate and independent degree granting unit from the College of Liberal Arts established in 1961 (Buenrostro & Orendain, 1992; Vallejo, 1990, 1994; Faderon, 2008).

Other Philippine colleges and universities also offered library science courses from 1935 onwards such as University of Santo Tomas, Philippine Normal University, Centro Escolar University, University of San Carlos and many more. From the beginnings of these library schools to present, many changes have been met and challenges overcame.

This paper presents the current (2015 to present) concerns of Philippine LIS education, its context and factors affecting its continued development. Data were gathered from various sources such as available data from the Professional Regulatory Board for Librarians, the Survey of Philippine LIS Schools, and accounts of Philippine LIS educators and experts.

### **The Development of Library Education**

Lynch (2008) has outlined the development of modern library education in the context of the US and the issues surrounding its development. While libraries existed in the ancient times when people started collecting records and other information materials, education for librarians was only formalized in the mid-1800 when discussion on the needed training for custodians of books abound. Library education started primarily as an apprenticeship program to address the increasing demand for librarians. It was professionalized later when it was established as part of the programs of a college. The development of library education revolves around these influences as according to her: nature of the work and the kind training needed; the students; the curriculum; the faculty; and accreditation and certification.

In Asia, aside from the Philippines, other countries have long established library science education. India has established library education in 1911 which traces its roots back to Melvil Dewey, as his students W. A. Borden, Asa Don Dickenson, and of course, S. R. Ranganathan, founded their respective library schools in various parts of the country (Kaur, 2015). In China, the first library school was established in 1920 at the Wuhan University (Shen, Xu, & Xie, 2001) and in Japan, a course in librarianship was instituted at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1917. The Ministry of Education in Japan formally established a Training Institute for Librarians in 1921 (Matsumura, 1982). Similar to the library education in the US, the concerns are about the management, organization and services of libraries. The said library schools in Asia were established mainly to train and produce librarians who will manage their libraries.

Library education significantly changed in the 1990s, when computers were used, and information started to go digital. The skill sets of librarians needed to change to keep up with the demands of the profession, thus the change in the curriculum. This change in the curriculum also

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brought about the changes in the focus of library schools. A quick survey of the history of library schools in the US show that there were several changes in their focus, curricula and even their name. University of Syracuse School of Information is the “first library school to embrace the broader field of information” (“History”, 2017). They have changed their name to School of Information as early as 1973. Several others soon followed suit. Courses offered were no longer limited to Library Science but included Informatics, Information Science, Computing, Archives and others. The training and education no longer focused only on books as the material embodiment of information. The focus shifted to information itself regardless of medium and on how people create, store, access, use, and disseminate information.

### **Library Education in the Philippine Context**

Similar to the development of library education in the US, Philippine LIS education is also shaped by the profession, the academic institutions that offer the program, the students, the faculty, and the curriculum. These variables in a way dictate the success or demise of LIS education in the country. While the trend of change to School of Information happened in the US happened as early as the 70s, this has not caught up with Philippines just yet.

### The Profession and the Practice

The profession in a way dictates what learning objectives the LIS schools should address. In terms of needs and competencies, it is the profession that defines in what way librarians should be trained and educated. In the Philippines, a great factor affecting the profession is the legislation that mandates the profession. This mandate translates to the schools as this limits the coverage and scope of LIS practice and thus its training and education.

Republic Act (RA) 6966, a law enacted in 1992, professionalized the practice of librarianship. It was repealed upon the enactment of RA 9246 in 2003 which in turn modernized the practice of librarianship. The law dictates the scope of the practice of librarianship and limits it as well. This in turn dictates what LIS schools should be teaching to their students such that they will be able to address the needs of the profession. Schools should not be limited to the law, because if so, there will be no improvement in the profession if the law and LIS education continues to be so. Seemingly a chicken and egg situation but this shouldn't be because laws can be amended and repealed.

While RA 9246 was mandated to alleviate the concerns of librarians such as low salaries, underemployment, non-professionals manning libraries and the like, it seemed to do more harm than good by mandating a separate program and college. Various schools have shut down due to low enrolment and low support from their administrations. However, with the developments in information and communications technology (ICT) and the re-alignment of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) program to accommodate more ICTs, the prospect is clear that there is a chance for LIS schools to increase their enrolment. Some LIS schools have partnered with the College of Information Technology (or similar college) to enable partnership between faculty members in the teaching of the

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ICT courses. Given this re-alignment and partnership, opportunities abound such as more students, and possibilities of additional funding especially for computer laboratories.

Among the goals of the former director of the National Library of the Philippines, Atty. Antonio M. Santos, was to advance the practice of librarianship in the Philippines. He wanted to address the problem of the low passing rate for the librarian licensure examinations. For one, there are only a few graduates of BLIS or MLIS and even fewer pass the licensure examinations (Ramos, Ananoria, & Nera, 2013). That is why in one of his salons, he requested for the cooperation of LIS experts and faculty of LIS schools to form a Committee on Philippine Library Education and determine what needs to be done. The Committee determined specific concerns of the profession and among the main concerns include the education of librarians. In a separate meeting, he convened heads of LIS schools to discuss said concerns. On March 4, 2014, the Council of Deans and Heads of Library and Information Science Schools (CODHLIS) was formed and they were mandated to alleviate the status of LIS education in the country. The CODHLIS, in cooperation with other LIS schools, have started training of teachers, development of syllabi to fulfil the mandate of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines to have outcomes-based syllabi, and development of modules for LIS.

The Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI) has taken the responsibility of moving toward the amendment of RA 9246 as they conducted the first PLAI Summit on March 17-18, 2016. Much is to be done but they have made the first step by organizing the event and discussing and taking to consideration the interests of the profession and its stakeholders. The profession can thus be said to be working toward making respective changes and adopting necessary improvements deemed needed. The participation of LIS educators in the series of fora is a prospect enough for LIS schools to be heard in the framing of the amendments of the law. The concern on what should be taught in LIS schools are dependent on what is mandated thus, the possibility of separating the field of LIS and archives is being proposed to give due weight and focus to the archives field and more importantly, to provide more focus to LIS. While librarians are assigned with records management and archives tasks, it is not their sole purpose and duty to do so. Also, we have to respect that there is a separate field of archives and records management.

Independent libraries with their respective librarians are continuously improving their services and this is mainly done with the use of ICTs. As such, knowledge and skills pertaining to the use and functions of ICTs is now a necessary competency for librarians entering the profession. This is one way by which the profession relates with education—in one way, education should respond to the needs of the profession but on the other hand, which should be a better scenario, education should advance the profession.

A recent development in the profession is the RA 10912 or the Continuing Professional Education Act which lapsed into law in 2015. The Professional Regulatory Board-Board for Librarians

(PRB-BFL) has conducted series of talks through Hon. Lourdes David (also the Chair of the CPD Council for Librarians) as assisted by the members of the committee, to enlighten the librarians about the law and its implementing rules and regulations. LIS schools may serve as program providers and this gives them the change to improve the basic undergraduate training.

#### Education Institutions that Offer LIS: Colleges, Faculty and Students

There are only a few schools offering LIS in the country, whether in the graduate or undergraduate program. There are roughly about 100 higher education institutions that offer LIS. The students in these programs are also a minority in their respective schools. Given that they are a minority in terms of enrolment, they are also a minority in terms of funding especially when they are private schools dependent on matriculation fees. In a survey conducted by CODHLIS sometime in academic year (AY) 2014-2015, 10 LIS schools complied and answered the survey. Data on BLIS enrolment from these respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Enrollment of BLIS in Selected LIS Schools AY 2014-2015*

LIS School	BLIS	Rank
Manuel S. Enverga University Foundation	37	6
Department of LIS, Polytechnic University of the Philippines	160	2
Department of LIS, University of St. Louis	36	7
Misamis University (BLIS)	21	9
University of Batangas	7	10
School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines	230	1
College of Teacher Education, University of Northern Philippines	83	5
College of Education, Bulacan State University	104	3
School of Liberal Arts and Education, La Consolacion College	34	8
College of Arts and Sciences, Leyte Normal University	103	4

The survey was sent out via email as a form in .doc format where the respondents can input their answers. This aimed to determine the status of LIS schools to understand what aspects need intervention. Of the 100 or so LIS schools, only 10 were returned but CODHLIS continues to reach out to other LIS schools for networking and collaboration.

It can be seen from Table 1 that the University of the Philippines has the most enrollees (n=230) and yet, they are still a minority in the said university with an overall enrollment of 16,672 undergraduate students (data as of August 2014). Such is also the case with the other LIS schools as shared by LIS educators. They have difficulty enlisting students directly from high school. This observation was also documented by several studies as early as the 70s and even in the current times (Buenrostro, 1977; Espiritu, 2012).

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As also seen in Table 1, the program is mostly situated within a college and most relate to the College of Education or Liberal Arts. Unlike in the US where they are separate units or independent units. This is an effect of their low enrollment and this is also the reason why they don't have their own dean. However, they have department chairs or program coordinators who oversee the program.

Before 2009, LIS is being offered mostly as a major under Bachelor of Elementary or Secondary Education as a major as with the cases of University of Santo Tomas, Philippine Normal University and Centro Escolar University but a few offer it as an independent program as Bachelor of Library Science as with the case of University of the Philippines. After 2009, the schools have offered the program separate from other colleges. But they are still under their previous colleges (i.e. College of Education) for administrative purposes as their population is still small to merit their own college and dean.

Faculty members are also quite few for LIS schools. In most cases, faculty members are librarians first and foremost, thus teaching only part time. While this brings about a more experienced librarian, the classes are scheduled either too early or too late—before or after the office hours of the librarian or on weekends. This may present limitations for both the teacher and the student. The students may be too tired because they go to school too early or too late. The teachers, on the other hand, may be overwhelmed with too much work as library work is quite as tasking as teaching.

#### Accreditation and Quality Assurance

CHED is tasked to oversee the operations of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. This is the primary accreditation and quality assurance arm for HEIs. There are specific Technical Panels and Technical Committees per program. The Technical Committee on LIS (TC-LIS) oversees LIS programs among LIS schools. TC-LIS also formulate policies and programs for LIS education and evaluate its implementation among schools. As presented by Peralejo (2015) during the 6th Asia-Pacific Library and Information Education and Practice (A-LIEP) Conference, TC-LIS have projects and activities that are geared toward the improvement of LIS Education. One important development is the new policies, standards, and guidelines (PSG) for BLIS (CMO 24, s. 2015) that specifies the competencies, program and learning outcomes for graduates of BLIS across all schools. As such, the CODHLIS have conducted several meetings, seminars and workshops to improve all syllabi for LIS. This is a work in progress and the goal is for these syllabi to be translated to modules such that there will be more resources available for LIS students and teachers alike. CODHLIS is also in constant partnership with LIS schools and with another organization for LIS teachers—the Philippine Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (PATLS) for programs conducted to enrich their capabilities. They have partnered in the LIS Research Summit, which is a seminar-workshop catering to the alleviation of research activities and publication of LIS teachers both in their profession and in their teaching.

One concern for this new PSG however is the inclusion of 18 units of ICT courses as there are limited capabilities among existing/current LIS educators to teach ICT courses for LIS. While this compels LIS schools to better themselves, the difficulty lies in having capable teachers. Given this concern, a Teacher Training Course was conducted by the UP School of Library and Information Studies in April of 2016 to build capabilities of current LIS teachers. This is intended to continue for the next years to come to support the training needs of teachers to enable LIS schools to fulfil the mandates of the policies and standards.

Accreditation is also conducted by entities other than CHED. Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA), Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) and Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, Inc. (AACUP) are among the accrediting agencies in the Philippines. The BLIS program of the College of Education of the University of Santo Tomas was recently granted Candidate accreditation status in AY 2014-2015. It is hoped that others would follow suit and subject their programs to evaluation, all for the improvement of LIS education.

Beyond accreditation concerns is the recognition of Centers of Excellence (COE) and Centers of Development (COD). These are awarded to programs in HEIs who display excellent qualities and produce quality professionals. This is the ultimate accreditation/recognition awarded for programs as this is an assurance of quality and serve as inspiration to other LIS schools. In 2016, University of Santo Tomas LIS Program was awarded COD while University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies was awarded COE.

### Curriculum

For so long, the curriculum was maintained to include LIS courses for technical (cataloging, indexing etc.) and services (reference) and more. It was only in the 1990s that LIS curriculum saw significant changes in its curriculum with the inclusion of IT courses of at least 6 units. Since the BLIS program is closely connected with the College of Education, as in the case of most LIS schools, their curriculum includes teacher education units (e.g., teaching strategies, classroom management, etc.). This is an advantage for those who are employed as school librarians because they no longer need additional training specific to teaching. In the Philippines, it is the practice that school librarians be assigned with teaching load. The new curriculum mandated by CMO 24 s. 2015 provides for 18 units of ICT courses and 21 units of electives or so called as special topics of which 6 units are for teaching strategies and educational technology.

### **Conclusion**

Given the context and status of LIS schools, the following challenges are noted: low enrolment, lack of capable teachers, negative perceptions on the program, inadequate support for programs and infrastructure, and problems with compliance. Low enrolment results in low income, especially in the case of private institutions. This in turn translates to lower financial support which includes library

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materials, laboratory, infrastructure etc. Lack of capable teachers, especially now that ICT courses are included in the curriculum, results to low passing rate in the board exams. All these concerns result in low compliance to standards thus the possibility of discontinuation of the program thus rendering a lower chance of answering the demands of the industry.

A bleak picture may have been painted with the challenges, but these are not without solutions as seen in the previous sections. The CHED, respective LIS educators, CODHLIS and PATLS and all the other stakeholders should continue working harmoniously to deliver improvements in LIS education in the Philippines. Such efforts will definitely lead to more equipped teachers in LIS, thus better performance among LIS students thereby having increased passing in the board exams. By achieving all these, there can be an increased number of professional librarians, therefore better services in libraries and information centers and by extension, a more informed society—a goal that the stakeholders should all strive to achieve in facing the challenges to LIS education.

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