Employable LIS courses in Bangladesh: an analysis of last twenty year syllabuses

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Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the LIS syllabuses of the last twenty years in all the levels of Bangladesh. A comprehensive review of literature has been done, and data has been collected through visits to different library education institutions. The library education in all levels has received very little attention, though library needs dynamic personality with proper education to assure its ultimate goal. None of the department or LIS institutions have ever conducted any survey to determine the needs of the country's libraries and information centers for the qualification of personnel required to staff such institutions as well as development of the courses as per true need. This paper identified the strength and weakness, and suggests some measures for forthcoming syllabuses as well as improving the quality of library education for the benefits of future library professionals.

Keywords: Library and information science, library education system, syllabus.

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1 Introduction

The diversity in the library services scenario of Bangladesh is an important aspect for consideration while speaking employable LIS courses for the 3rd millennium. Since different library sectors are in different stages of development and no single solution or approach are relevant in Bangladesh perspective. Bangladeshi library and information sector can be divided into five major broad areas like national, public, academic (school, college, madrasha), university, research and special libraries sector. The research and special library sector is more developed and modernized than the other four sectors. The challenges that Bangladeshi libraries and librarians encounter at nowadays are manifold, but the most important challenge is to change in the very nature of libraries and librarians, i.e., the libraries must change from a collection-oriented institutions to service oriented organizations, and librarians have to change from custodians of books to information managers. In this changing scenario, information technology is playing the most important role. At the decision-making level, Bangladesh needs a national policy for libraries and information centers within the changed socioeconomic environment, keeping in mind the new requirements of the different sectors within the field of librarianship. It is worthwhile to analyze the present library and information course scenario before preparing a vision of librarianship in Bangladesh.

2 Methodology

The study is based on a comprehensive review of literature, computation of secondary information, and treatment of primary data collected by field visits to different library education institutions. Meticulous literatures have been searched, also of unpublished sources and archival reports and documents available are consulted. A number of institutions have been visited to examine their situation. Conversation and informal interviews with leading library educators, eminent professionals, and scholars interested in libraries and working library professionals are carried out.

3 Present scenario of library education in Bangladesh

Library education in Bangladesh is offering programs in different levels like Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), Bachelor, Master, MPhil and PhD. Library Association of Bangladesh has affiliated 11 institutions to conduct the certificate program. In certificate level, students have to complete total 700 marks (LAB, 2007) in 6 months duration. University of Science & Technology Chittagong is offering a certificate program giving emphasis for Library Assistant for medical libraries (Islam & Chowdhury, 2006). With the affiliation of National University 15 institutions are offering PGD program of total 1000 marks in one year duration (National University, 2009). International Islamic University of Chittagong is offering one-year PGD and it

covers 1000 marks (IIUC, 2009). Darul Ihsan University is offering 24 credits for one-year PGD (DIU, 2009).

Table 1: Total marks/credit taught in different library science programs*

Level	Name of the program	Name/number of the institutions	Total marks/credit
Certificate	Certificate	11 institutions under LAB, University of Science & Technology of Chittagong	700
Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma	15 institutions under National University	1000
	Postgraduate Diploma	Darul Ihsan University	24 Credits
	Postgraduate Diploma	International Islamic University of Chittagong	1000
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts (Pass)	16 colleges under National University	400 (Optional)
	Bachelor of Arts (Honors)	Lalmatia Girls College under National University	2200
	Bachelor of Arts (Honors)	University of Dhaka	3000 (120 credits)
	Bachelor of Social Science (Honors)	University of Rajshahi	2500
Postgraduate	Master of Arts	University of Dhaka	500
	Master of Arts (Evening)	University of Dhaka	1200
	Master of Arts	Darul Ihsan university	62 credits
	Master of Arts	Lalmatia Girls College under National University	1300
	Master of Social Science	Asian University of Bangladesh	48 credits
	Master of Social Science	University of Rajshahi	600
	Master of Science	Royal University of Dhaka	1600
	Master of Philosophy	University of Dhaka	300 marks followed by an original thesis
	Master of Philosophy	University of Rajshahi	300 marks followed by an original thesis
Doctoral	Doctor of Philosophy	University of Dhaka	Submission of an original thesis
	Doctor of Philosophy	University of Rajshahi	Course work and submission of an original thesis

*Present survey

The table 1 shows that the total marks taught at different levels or even at the same level differ from institution to institutions.

At undergraduate level, University of Dhaka is offering four-year BA (Hons.) program and total 3000 marks (University of Dhaka, 2008) have to be covered by the students to achieve the degree. University of Rajshahi is offering four-year BSS (Hons.), where total 2500 marks covered in the

said degree (University of Rajshahi, 2008) Besides, 16 Colleges under National University are offering 400 marks in library and information science as an optional subject in BA (pass) course that of three-year duration (National University, 2007). Lalmatia Girls' College is also offering four- year B.A. (Hons.) course and covers total 2200 marks.

At the graduate level, University of Dhaka offering 500 marks (University of Dhaka, 2009) and University of Rajshahi offering 600 marks (University of Rajshahi, 2009) for one-year MA. University of Dhaka also offers MA (Evening) program for graduates other than library and information science or who has already achieved PGD in library and information science. Total 1200 marks have to be covered by the students to achieve the master degree (evening) in 4 semesters (University of Dhaka, 2006). Royal University of Dhaka introduced a two-year MSc which covered total 1600 marks. Darul Ihsan University has introduced 2-year (4 semesters) MA, where students have to complete 62 credits to achieve the degree (DIU, 2009). Lalmatia Girls' College under National University has introduced a two-year MA and covering 1300 marks. Asian University of Bangladesh is offering two-year MSS in information science & library management , and covers 48 credits (AUB, 2009).

University of Dhaka, and University of Rajshahi are offering two-year MPhil and three year PhD degree. In the first year of MPhil program, the researcher has to pass 300 marks examination comprises of two courses of 100 marks each followed by a viva voce of 100 marks. During the second year, the researcher has to submit an original research work under the guidance of a supervisor followed by the thesis defense (viva voce). At the University of Dhaka, no course work is required and the PhD candidate generally works on a thesis topic under a supervisor for two to three years. On the other hand, a PhD researcher has to take some course work in his first year the first year of the program at the University of Rajshahi.

4. Courses offered in library education programs in Bangladesh

The syllabus of the certificate and PGD programs are administrated and affiliated by the LAB and National University respectively. The syllabuses are still largely of the conventional pattern. The majority of the syllabuses gives importance on traditional library skills like classification and cataloguing, which cover almost half of the syllabus in both the levels. The typical course contents of the certificate program are: classification (theory and practice), cataloguing (theory and practice), information sources and reference services, society, library and communication, library management, information services. In the PGD program course contents are: society, library and information communication, library management, classification (theory and practice), cataloguing (theory and practice), documentation, indexing & abstracting, bibliography, reference and

information service record and archive management, computer application and information technology in libraries.

In universities, the course for the bachelor and master degree programs are also very much traditional, although increased quantum of information technology is being introduced. There have not been substantial efforts to revise the curriculum radically to answer the modern challenges and requirements of the profession. Existing bachelor level courses are: foundation of information and library studies, organization of information, information source and service, new technologies and current trends in information system, records and archives management, information resources development, information production, marketing and public relation, indexing and abstracting, information science, communication and documentation, organization of knowledge (classification theory and practice), organization of knowledge (cataloguing theory and practice), information networking and resource sharing, research methodology, international and comparative librarianship, social organization, writing editing and publishing, socio-political history of Bangladesh, applied statistics, database design and applications, hardware maintenance and troubleshooting, management theories and systems, system analysis and design, automation of information institution. At master level: advanced classification (theory and practical), advanced cataloguing (theory and practical), information retrieval technique, library system and services, internet studies and web design, library software packages: design and application courses are available.

5. Analysis of library education syllabuses of last twenty years

After the comprehensive review of different syllabuses of all the levels of the last twenty years, we found that all the syllabuses from certificate to master level in private and public university or institutes are based on the undergraduate syllabuses of the University of Dhaka. They largely depend on the changes that made by the University of Dhaka. To prepare the professionals and meet the emerging needs of information users and services the University of Dhaka radically revised and updated its undergraduate syllabus four times in the last twenty years. During the session 1987-88, the department of library and information science of the University of Dhaka introduced a three-year BA honors program (University of Dhaka, 1988). This was the first time in Bangladesh to introduce a bachelor program for library education with this syllabus. During the session 1994-95, the University approved a modified syllabus for integrated BA (honors) course (University of Dhaka, 1995). In the session 1997-98, the University introduced four-year integrated BA (honors) program instead of three-year program keeping pace with the changing situation in the field of information and communication technology, and necessary changes have also been made in

the course curriculum that followed until 2005-06 session (University of Dhaka, 1998). From the session 2006-07, the University introduced the semester system instead of year-system for BA (honors) program. A total eight semesters or four years are required to complete the whole program (University of Dhaka, 2008). At the same time a new syllabus with credit system has been approved for semester system.

Before assessing the relevance of any syllabus, it is necessary to examine what contents it is intended to fulfill first. According to the course contents, we can categorize all courses in three broad areas: i) Core courses, ii) Information technology related courses, iii) Non library related courses. The outline of all the four syllabuses can be summarized chronologically as follows:

Table 2: Chronological summary of all the syllabuses

Board Areas	First syllabus 1987 – 88		Second syllabus 1994 – 95		Third syllabus 1997 – 98		Fourth syllabus 2006 - 07	
Session	No. of courses	Full marks	No. of courses	Full marks	No. of courses	Full marks	No. of courses	Full marks
Core courses	05	350	13	975	11	800	15	1500
IT related courses	01	70	01	50	06	475	05	500
Non LIS courses	06	420	06	300	08	575	05	500
Comprehensive	1	50	------	------	------	------	------	------
Internship	1	25	1	25	------	------	01	100
Viva voce	------	25	------	50	------	50	-	160
Practical	------	------	2	50	2	50	02	200
Tutorial	------	120*	------	50	------	50	------	------
Incourse	------	240*	------	------	------	------	------	------
Class attendance and presentation	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	40
Total marks	14	1300	23	1500	27	2000	28	3000

* Considered as part of the respective course

The table 2 indicates that the first syllabus offered 14 courses that raise to 28 courses in the fourth syllabus, which is just double of the first one. None but only the first syllabus included the comprehensive test of 50 marks. No marks were assigned for practical examinations in the first syllabus. Class attendance and presentation were incorporated only in the fourth syllabus bearing 40 marks.

5.1 Core courses

Core courses are indispensable for any discipline. However, it is found that the traditional core curriculum has received great importance in all the syllabuses. Further, stress has been given to the historical development of books, concepts of librarianship, effective use of information

institutions, evolution of own discipline, building a library collection, library and information center, management of information sources, reference services, bibliography, indexing, abstracting, documentation, classification and cataloguing (theory and practical), comparative librarianship, etc, and are taught in most of the syllabuses as core course contents.

Comparatively, the syllabus one incorporated new issues like information marketing, awareness about copyright law and censorship, records and archives management, information retrieval and dissemination. However, topics like research and analytical skills, modern library management, development of basic communication skills, organizing skills; preservation and conservation skills, service skills for disable people, library planning, library public relation are still neglected in broad scale.

Table 3: Core courses offered in different syllabuses

Syllabus	No. of core courses	No. of total courses	Full marks for core courses	Total marks in the syllabus	% of core courses	% of core course marks
First (1987-88)	5	14	500	1300	35.71 %	38.46 %
Second (1994-95)	13	23	975	1500	56.52%	65 %
Third (1997-98)	11	27	800	2000	40.74 %	40 %
Fourth (2006-07)	15	28	1500	3000	53.57 %	50 %

The table 3 indicates that initially BA (honors) course was prepared with 5 core courses. The number of courses noticeably increased to 13 in the second syllabus and declined to 11 in the third syllabus, but rose to 15 in the fourth syllabus. In the syllabus of 1994-95, 65% marks were allotted for the core courses whereas other syllabuses have not exceed more than 50% of the total marks.

5.2 Information technology related courses

The revolution in ICT has considerably changed both the education of information professionals and the information profession. Several curricula in Europe and the USA added many courses on use of ICT and are gradually moving from 'pure' library science to the hybrid field of information management, which draws its philosophy from both library science and information systems. The enrichment and growth of microcomputers and their decreasing prices have made them an attractive option for Bangladesh.

Table 4: Information technology related course offered in different syllabuses

Syllabus	No. of IT related courses	No. of total courses	Full marks for IT related courses	Total marks in the syllabus	% of IT related courses	% of IT related marks
First (1987-88)	1	14	100	1300	7.14 %	7.69 %
Second (1994-95)	1	23	50	1500	4.35 %	3.33 %
Third (1997-98)	6	27	475	2000	22.22 %	23.75 %
Fourth (2006-07)	5	28	500	3000	17.86 %	16.67 %

The table 4 shows that in the first and second syllabuses only one IT-related course was offered. The course covered only 7.69% and 3.33% of the total marks respectively. Though the involvement of IT increased and reached at 23.75% in the third syllabus, but moderately decreased in next syllabus by 7.08%. This is not a cheering feature at all, while curricula should reshaped in order to accommodate the rising needs for knowing and handling new technologies.

There is no provision has been made, so that the students can learn at least one library software in their four-year period. Present IT related courses are based on theory only, which has no implication without any practical application and data manipulation and retrieval. As a result, the inconsistencies remain in the syllabus. Though in the last syllabus, 500 marks are allocated for the IT related courses, but, practical exam related to IT has not been assigned. To learn IT, theories are never sufficient as there is little or no use of learning practical in IT classes. If there is no provision of evaluating what the students have learned students give less priority to those as a nature, wheareas, students give emphasis on those courses where there is an examination.

5.3 Non library related courses

Necessity of non library related courses are important for subject background and crucial for the knowledge development of any discipline. In all the syllabuses emphasis has been laid on non library related course. The inclusions of Bengali and English languages in third and fourth syllabuses are not appropriate at the bachelor level where the course contents cover only grammar of the respective language. This is eventually overlapping of education as the students have already learned grammar for 7 to 8 years before entering university level. Writing, editing and publishing course contents are good enough if the whole course contents cover during that semester. The rising issue 'web publishing' still has been ignored in the syllabus.

Table 5: Non library related courses offered in different syllabuses

Syllabus	No. of non library related courses	No. of Total courses	Full marks for non library related courses	Total marks in the syllabus	% of non library related courses	% of non library related marks
First (1987-88)	6	14	420	1300	42.86 %	32.31 %
Second (1994-95)	6	23	300	1500	26.09%	20 %
Third (1997-98)	8	27	575	2000	29.63 %	28.75 %
Fourth (2006-07)	5	28	500	3000	17.86 %	16.67 %

The table 5 shows that in the first, and third syllabuses 32.31% and 28.75% of total marks were allotted for non library related courses, while 20% and 16.67% for the second and fourth syllabuses respectively. The highest numbers of non library related courses were offered in the third syllabus and the lowest numbers are in the fourth syllabus.

5.4 Practical

The library education without practical of classification and cataloguing in bachelor level is absolutely a wrong idea in the context of Bangladesh. But, it is true that the first syllabus was affected by this awful concept.

Table 6: Practical courses offered in different syllabuses

Syllabus	Full marks for practical	Total marks in bachelor level	% of practical marks
First (1987-88)	----------	1300	-----------
Second (1994-95)	50	1500	3.33%
Third (1997-98)	50	2000	2.50%
Fourth (2006-07)	200	3000	6.67%

The table 6 indicates that the second and third syllabuses tried to cover the deficiencies in case of practical courses and only 50 marks were allotted and that was also divided in two courses e.g. classification practical and cataloguing practical equally. The fourth syllabus incorporated two full-fledged courses bearing 100 marks each, named practical classification, and practical cataloguing.

5.5 Internship

The internship is one of the few opportunities where students have to test their skills, attitudes being developed and discussed in their academic program. An internship that integrates the student as an operating member of a management staff is a critical component of library education. The internship provides students with work experiences to give them a realistic exposure to an

organizational or bureaucratic environment of a library. These experiences enhance the students' awareness of the internal dynamics of a library and the values and attitudes of employees toward both their clientele and their administrative superiors.

Twenty-five marks were allotted for internship during 1987-88 to 1996-97 sessions. But, from 1997-98 to 2005-06 sessions, the provision of the internship was ignored in the syllabus. In this long period of eight years, it was a total loss for the students who missed to be trained practically within their syllabus from different libraries. However, the department understood the loss and incorporated a full course of internship bearing 100 marks from the session 2006-07. The present attempt of incorporating internship in the latest syllabus will give students the opportunity to be aware of their obligations as professionals to the public.

6 Discussion

The second syllabus took 10 years time to be appeared after the first one, but remained only for three years. The third syllabus stayed for long 9 years. The fourth syllabus has started from the 2006-07 session. Introducing or upgrading of the syllabuses has been done due to specific factors only. For example, the first syllabus was introduced due to adoption of honors course, the second one designed for the integrated honors course, the third one came out due to induction of four-year bachelor program, the last one designed for introducing a semester system. Therefore, it is clear that none has appeared on the basis of practical and professional need of library and information centers of the country.

Analysis of the course contents of the last twenty years reveals that these concentrate on training personnel to manage a library by providing in-depth knowledge of traditional library practices. Undergraduate students are provided with an introductory or basic level knowledge of traditional library practices. There is no option to be a subject specialist for example, social science, natural science, medical, engineering, agriculture, literature and humanities library. The syllabuses were strenuous in areas in the following order priority: history of books and libraries, bibliography and reference, abstracting and indexing, building library collections, cataloging and classification (theory & practice), documentation and information retrieval, archives management, library networking and resource sharing, etc. More or less the content of the above-mentioned courses included in the syllabuses with different course titles. But, what is being practiced in most libraries is reflected a little in all the syllabuses. The real need to manage a library the basic skills like information services skills, research and analytical skills, communication skills, acquisition development skills, management skills, subject knowledge, and information services organizing

skills are not included. The mission, goal and objectives have not been set for the library science education in any syllabuses. Each course objectives, learning outcome of each unit or course has not been set in any syllabus too. As a result, students are not getting much interested to pursue a course.

Day-by-day, services are differing from library to library, though there are definitely some elements common to all types of libraries. Functions of different libraries are being at variance. But, no such provision has been made in the syllabuses to be specialized in any area rather all are trained in traditional librarianship. Insufficient library education programs create hindrance in the production of necessary professional manpower required for the development of libraries and librarianship in the country. Nowadays, traditional courses are not that much effective in real life library management. Library education needs a specialization either in academic (school, college & madrasha), university, public, national or special library. One student should specialize in one library system, and can utilize the specialized knowledge in practical life to prove him/her worthy to that library system.

No library visit/tour has been integrated into any of the syllabuses. To gain practical knowledge about library activities, and report writing on observation through library visit/tour is very essential. New graduates need to be skilled in information technology, industry or subject knowledge, information management, human resources management, managerial finance, information literacy, interpersonal relationship/communication, public relation, adding value to information by analysis and synthesis, teamwork, change management, sharing and collaborating. A reflection of the afforested skills has not been accommodated in the contents of all the syllabuses till now.

The reality of the present library education system in Bangladesh indicates that the quality improvement is essential and unavoidable, not only for its survival, but also for facing the major changes and challenges of today and tomorrow. Students have to compete with other professionals to survive in the information profession and have to be equipped with a curriculum, which can make them function as competent information professionals. Familiarity and education with IT-based resources and services, such as e-mail, FTP, Telnet, www, browsers, search engines, databases, system software, application software, electronic journals, computer conferences, scholarly discussion lists, mailing lists, Usenet newsgroups, websites, etc. should be made during the undergraduate level.

7 Suggestions for forthcoming syllabuses

Since librarianship is making available and exploiting information for the benefit of people, librarians must know about information resources, about people, their culture, and about systems for linking resources with the people. They need basic abilities – literacy and numeracy, organizational qualities, including vision, a questioning approach, perspective, problem-solving and analytical skills, communication and social skills, political and economical skills, a sense of service and an ability to accept uncertainty; 'professional' knowledge relevant to librarianship; and practical library skills, etc. New graduates are facing challenges in the real world of library activities where special libraries, private school, college and university libraries are demanding skills and efficiency in their respective fields. The syllabus should be upgraded at regular intervals. For the forthcoming syllabuses here are some suggestions:

i) There is an urgent need to conduct a survey to determine the current and forthcoming needs of the country's libraries and information institutions and the required type of personnel to administer such organizations. The Findings of the study can be helpful for library educators who might be interested in developing and designing skill upgrading courses, as well as to review and develop library curricula.

ii) In order to remain competitive, more emphasis should be given on practical application of computers and related technologies in forthcoming syllabus. At least 50% of the syllabus should be covered by the use and application of information technology to strengthen the LIS program.

iii) To keep track with the rapid development in the field and changes of library and information center's need of the country, the syllabuses should be updated both in course design and content at a regular interval of at best four years.

iv) To incorporate courses like training in research and technical writing, statistical and analytical skills are needed.

v) Much closer association with local libraries; more practical works by students, more teaching by local practicing librarians, and more experimentation by the local libraries are needed.

vi) The students should also encourage participating in verbal discussion and presentation in the class to develop their communication skills, since much of the library professional work is done publicly and verbally.

vii) The library education is an interdisciplinary subject, finding applications in different fields like commerce, business, industries, health science, technology, social studies and so on. To

meet the requirements of manpower in these field relevant specializations in the form of elective courses should be offered.

viii) Topics like information literacy, record management, research and analytical skills, modern library management, basic communication skills, organizing skills; preservation and conservation skills, service skills for disable people, library planning should be incorporated in the syllabuses.

ix) Provision should be made so that undergraduate students can learn at least one library packaged software to operate in full swing in their four-year time.

8 Conclusion

Library education in Bangladesh has received very little attention, although libraries need dynamic people with the proper education to achieve their goals. Library science programs have not conducted surveys to determine the needs of the country's libraries and information centers, to determine the courses needed to staff such institutions. Dearth of real world interaction leaves the LIS programs uninformed of the necessities and activities of the current job-market. The offered programs lose the opportunity of refurbishing their courses and orientation towards market demands. As a result student loses the opportunity for knowing the cutting edge of jobs and thereby increasing their own employability.

Boarders of library education are growing, incorporating newer disciplines. An essential characteristic of information professions is their interdisciplinary character. They maintain rather "soft" margins not only among themselves, but also with related disciplines, such as: the communications, information and communication technology, computer science, psychology, linguistics, sociology and public relations, etc. The mapping of these disciplines and their relationships is imperative as view breaking research activities often take place in cross-disciplinary boundary regions. Due to the social, political, economical, technical and cultural changes in Bangladesh the needs for information have grown considerably over the past three decades. As a consequence, new requirements have emerged. The Bangladeshi information professional should possess adequate management, marketing, technical and communication skills in order to be able to comply with the information needs of society. Information professional knowledge cannot be anything but dynamic because it is a public service-oriented character and has human welfare being as its primary objective.

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