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## Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of BLIS (Bachelor in Library & Information Science) Program: in the perspective of curricula offered in universities of Pakistan

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# Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of BLIS (Bachelor in Library & Information Science) Program: in the perspective of curricula offered in universities of Pakistan

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## **Abstract**

The library schools of Pakistan are producing library professionals to work in different types of organizations. The fundamental education and training of librarianship is imparted at BLIS (one-year post-graduation) level which is named as BLIS, BA (Hon.), PGD (LIS) or MA (Previous) in different universities of Pakistan. The courses taught at this level are more or less same in all the universities. These are core courses and of compulsory nature and provide fundamental knowledge of librarianship. To examine the strengths and weaknesses of BLIS programs as experienced by the working professionals and their suggestions about inclusion/exclusion of the courses and suggestions about changes in BLIS programs and for the improvement of the quality of library education, focus group interviews of the alumni of all the library schools of Pakistan working in different types and sizes of libraries located in all the provinces of the country were conducted. As a result of these interviews and discussions, very useful information was obtained which can be helpful for developing and revising the curriculum.

## **Keywords**

LIS Curricula; Library Education in Pakistan; LIS Curricula – Strengths & Weakness; Library Education and Curricula

## **Introduction**

Many library managers and administrators believe that the purpose of library education is “to produce qualified staff for their libraries that will be competent to step into a professional post and perform the duties assigned to them, with only the minimum amount of in-service training being necessary.”(Bramley, 1975). This point of view is, however, vigorously opposed by library educationists, who argue that library schools should concentrate on ‘educating’ their students and leave it to the libraries themselves to train the students in the techniques of librarianship. Thus Dr. Lester Asheim has argued that in any programme relating to the function of the library as an intermediary between recorded information and the user who has need of it, the emphasis “should be upon the function of information in a society, rather than upon the characteristics of ten or twenty-five or fifty major reference tools... Instead of learning the specific features of particular reference sources or how to assign classification numbers, I would suggest that the beginning students first learn something of the purpose for which these tools and devices were designed.” (Asheim, 1977). However, it must be pointed out that while Dr. Asheim stresses that theory should precede practice, and that library education programmes should concentrate on principles and theory rather than on practical skills, he does not entirely reject the need for practice. He points out that professional knowledge consists of following three elements:

- “1. An underlying discipline or basic science component upon which the practice rests or from which it developed.

2. An applied science or ‘engineering’ component from which many of the day-to-day diagnostic procedures and problem solutions are derived.
3. A skills and attitudinal component that concerns the actual performance of services to the client, using the underlying basic and applied knowledge.” (Asheim, 1977, p. 136)

Thus, according to Dr. Asheim, the proper way to go about imparting professional knowledge would be to first introduce the underlying principles; then to introduce the practice and the skills.

As far as the library education is concerned, in the past it had not been treated as a subject but was regarded as a job-oriented technical education. It was considered, some 150 years ago, that to work in a library, some basic knowledge of selection, acquisition and organization of material and providing readers’ services was enough and all that could be learnt through some informal training. Even in the universities of most developed countries like America, it took a long time to introduce library science as a subject taught at Master’s level.

The education of library and information science at postgraduate level is being offered by the following nine public sector universities of Pakistan:

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. University of Karachi, Karachi          | (1956)               |
| 2. University of the Punjab, Lahore        | (1915*), (1959)      |
| 3. University of Peshawar, Peshawar        | (1962)               |
| 4. University of Sindh, Jamshoro           | (1965**), (1970)     |
| 5. University of Baluchistan, Quetta       | (1981)               |
| 6. Islamia University, Bahawalpur          | (1982-83)            |
| 7. Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad | (1985***), (2001***) |
| 8. University of Sargodha, Sargodha        | (2010)               |
| 9. Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak  | (2015)               |

\* Short Certificate course started in 1915, Postgraduate program was started in 1959.

\*\* At the time of establishment, the University was an examining and degree awarding body, but later on, in 1951, it got the status of an academic and research institution. The Department was established in 1965 with certificate course, but postgraduate program in Library Science was started in 1970.

\*\*\* The Library Science program was started in 1985 with an undergraduate short certificate course in Library Science but a regular on-campus Department was established in 2001.

Besides the above nine public sector universities of Pakistan, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan had also started postgraduate program in Library & Information Science in 2004, but after four years i.e. in 2008 the program was shelved due to some administrative reasons. Till now this program is suspended. This university had adopted the same scheme of studies being practiced by the University of Punjab. Three universities in private sector; Minhaj University, Lahore, Superior University, Lahore and Sarhad University of Science and Technology, Peshawar have also been offering the MLIS/M.Phil program since 2014.

All these library schools are producing library professionals who are working in different types of organizations in home and abroad. The fundamental education and training of librarianship is imparted at BLIS (one-year post-graduation) level which is named variously in different universities of Pakistan. To examine the strengths and weaknesses of BLIS program as experienced by the working professionals focus group interviews of the alumni of all the library

schools of Pakistan working in different types and sizes of libraries located in all the provinces of the country were conducted. The best and effective method of sharing views and opinions of the members of a community on a particular topic in a systemic and organized way is focus group interview. As, for this study, the professional viewpoints of the people occupied with a specific field (LIS) on a specific topic (strengths and weaknesses) are to be sought, the focus group interview is considered as one of the best activities. During the course of interviews, the participants' suggestions about inclusion/exclusion of the courses and suggestions about changes in BLIS program and for the improvement of the quality of library education were also sought.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the strengths and weaknesses of BLIS (postgraduate LIS) program.
- To seek suggestions from library professionals about inclusion/exclusion of the courses.
- To seek proposals about changes in BLIS program.
- To seek recommendations about the improvement of the quality of library education.

## **Literature Review**

Adequate literature is available on different aspects of the courses and curricula of library and information science taught at the universities of Pakistan. To avoid duplication or similarity, literature review has been confined to unique and important information relevant to this study.

Khan and Mahmood (2013) compared Pakistani LIS Schools curricula with HEC-designed curriculum for LIS schools in Pakistan. The paper identified the most common course titles and the most unique course titles taught in Pakistani universities' Library & Information Science departments. The study reveals that standard and uniformity is entirely neglected by the LIS schools of Pakistan. Courses in all library schools are offered according to their interest, causing problems for the graduates of these schools.

Khalid (2012) studied LIS curriculum for seeking the feedback of the senior librarians and employers of young librarians. Giving reference of his previous surveys, the author observed that the library practitioners had reservations on the quality of education, asserting the lacking pace of library schools in comparison to the technological and environmental developments growing rapidly in libraries. It is even difficult for them to get manpower with such qualities of intellectual knowledge, skills and attitude.

Warrach (2010) analyzed the curriculum of University of Punjab and conducted a survey on the alumni of the department to find out their satisfaction about the curricula they studied. She sought the opinion of the respondents about the shortcomings of the curriculum and hunted the proposals for improving the curriculum. Some of the problems or deficiencies pointed out in the survey include: Non-proficiency in written and spoken English, lack of knowledge of office communication, lack of interviewing skills, unawareness of advanced library softwares, lack of IT skills, poor interpersonal skills, lack of leadership skills, weak presentation skills, lack of research skills etc.

Discussing the merits and demerits of the courses of Library Management taught by all the library schools of Pakistan, Ameen (2006) observed that library leadership is almost an unfamiliar area in library and information science (LIS) education. The author is of the view that although all eight library schools in Pakistan are offering courses on library administration and management to transmit skills required for the management and organization of libraries but still there is minimal awareness regarding the value of persuading leadership qualities—apart from managerial skills—among LIS academia, practitioners and researchers. Findings suggest that information professionals today require quality of leadership and anticipation to innovate the future through planning and preventing from unexpected changes in such emerging social, technological and professional scenario of the country.

Haider (2006) analyzed six LIS Departments of the country with respect to their cataloging and classification courses' contents and teaching methodologies. As both of these courses are regarded as the core courses of library science and provide a foundation of librarianship, these are the integral part of the curricula at all academic levels of library education in Pakistan. The study reveals that in almost all library schools of the country, cataloging practices of the 1960s and 1970s dominate and it has not been modified. Moreover, there is an absence of latest technologies, deficiency of competent teachers, disappointing conditions of lab facilities in terms of equipment and library materials. Same is the situation of classification practices. There is a severe scarcity of DDC and LCC schedules. Although latest edition of DDC is purchased but only 8-10 sets are acquired due to shortage of financial resources. Students do practice in groups and 2-3 students share one set of the schedule. Suggestions comprise: curricula revision, organizing training of teachers for cataloging and classification courses in developed countries, improvement of laboratories, and the organization of continuing education programs.

After going through the literature on LIS curricula in Pakistan, it is concluded that all the library schools of the country are offering courses of their own accord and needs and rarely there are one or two schools that are following the curriculum designed by HEC. The literature also gives some suggestions to maintain the international standard and to fulfill the market needs. The most important shortcomings which are pointed out in the curricula include non-adoption of technological and environmental development as the job-offering organizations find lack of knowledge and skills about the modern innovations especially ICT in the prospective candidates. Another deficiency is verbal and written English communication. No doubt, it is not a professional weakness but it is expected a necessary ability for a librarian. Other deficiencies are unawareness about the latest library softwares and lack of leadership skills. To remove these shortcomings and enhance professional skills, the curriculum should be revised and updated by incorporating the relevant topics so that better job opportunities be acquired.

## **Research Methodology**

For the purpose of focus group interviews, the principal researcher contacted some experienced professionals across the country during the period of pandemic as it was suitable time for most of the professionals to spare time for online meetings. After getting consensus, the schedules of the meetings were shared with the participants. In making the schedules, the convenience of the participants and representation from all the provinces were taken into consideration. It was a golden opportunity for this researcher to conduct various focus group interviews of the professionals representing different provinces, library schools, and types and sizes of libraries. In

all, six groups of focus group interviews were managed in which some junior fellows (who had been the students of this researcher and are working as professional librarians in different organizations in Karachi) assisted the researcher in recording and taking notes.

### Targeted Population

Six groups of alumni of library schools of all the provinces and federal capital were constituted. The groups were formed with the consents of participants and each group was composed of an average 8 participants.

The following table shows the composition of all six focus groups with their association of types of libraries:

Composition of six focus groups with their association of types of libraries

Focus Group No.	Region/Province	Types of Libraries of the participants of the Group	No. of participants
1.	Khyber Pakhtoon khwah	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	3 0 3 4 <b>10</b>
2.	Federal Capital Islamabad	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	2 3 1 3 <b>9</b>
3.	Southern Punjab	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	2 0 3 3 <b>8</b>
4.	Central Punjab	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	3 0 2 3 <b>8</b>
5.	Baluchistan	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	2 0 2 7 <b>11</b>
6.	Sindh	Academic National Public Special <b>Total.....</b>	4 0 3 3 <b>10</b>

Hence in all, views of 56 library professionals were recorded. Of them, 16, 3, 14, and 23 were representing Academic, National, Public, and Special libraries respectively.

### **Determining the Questions for Interviews**

A series of relevant questions was identified to ask the participants of the groups. The questions were restricted to the strengths and weaknesses of BLIS (or equivalent) program, suggestions about changes and introduction of new courses, deduction of any unnecessary courses, and improvement of the quality of education in these programs,

### **Conducting the Interview**

Almost 10 days ahead of online meeting, the prospective participants were telephonically contacted and after obtaining their consent, course outlines and other relevant material and questions were e-mailed to them. They had immediately acknowledged the e-mail and also informed their schedule. Two groups of ten and nine members respectively were constituted representing KPK and Islamabad. The first focus group was composed of four librarians working in special libraries, three librarians each in public and academic libraries. The second group was composed of three librarians from National Library of Pakistan, two working in academic libraries, three in special libraries, and one was a public librarian. The third focus group comprising eight members was formed representing Southern Punjab for the interview on next day. The group was composed of three librarians each working in special and public libraries, and two librarians representing academic libraries. All the group members were well prepared and were having the relevant material along with them. The meetings continued for about an average 60-65 minutes.

After a gap of 2 days, three groups were constituted representing Punjab (excluding Southern Punjab), Baluchistan and Sindh. The first group was composed of total eight professionals including three librarians of almost equal status working in special libraries, two senior librarians of public libraries, two librarians working in school libraries, and one was a college librarian. The second group representing Baluchistan was composed of total eleven professionals including seven working in special libraries, and two each from public and academic libraries. The third group representing Sindh was composed of ten professionals including three librarians each from public and special libraries and four from academic libraries. Like the previous three groups, these group members were also well prepared and had relevant material with them. The meetings lasted for about one hour each.

The researcher moderated the meetings and before taking the input of the participants, they were briefed about the topic of the research and the data which was required. The preparation of the participants showed they had a lot to discuss.

### **Research Setting**

Since the participants had already been contacted almost 10 days ahead of the focus groups interviews so the groups were formed with the consent of the participants.

### **Data Collection**

Almost all the members of the designated groups participated actively and devotedly in the focus group interviews and gave their opinions about the questions presented before them.

### **Data Analysis**

Their views, opinions, and suggestions were analysed as follows:

- a) Transcription of data: important points of the discussions were noted and organized under identified terminologies.
- b) Deduction of unnecessary words and repetition: from among the notes unnecessary words, phrases and speeches and repetition of terminologies and titles of courses discussed in different groups were deducted.
- c) Refinement: the terminologies, titles of courses and their contents were formally refined after identifying the well-known and professional terminologies.
- d) Coding: these terminologies were finally coded (through open coding).

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

#### **Strengths of one-year postgraduate program in LIS**

The participants expressed their opinion openly on this issue. Some were very critical while the majority in all the groups encouraged the program through their comments. Almost all were in favour of the program and observed it should be continued as it produces library professionals with all basic abilities and competencies required to run a library professionally. They were of the view that this program enables a graduate to obtain a professional position in both public and private sector. The participants of a group observed that the core areas are being well covered by the courses offered in BLIS e.g. cataloguing, classification, collection development, serial management, management of library and information centers. After studying one year if the student wishes to abandon studies due to a reason or another, his/her this one year exercise will not go into trash as happens in majority of the Masters program, but he/she will be eligible to get a degree or a postgraduate diploma (PGD).

#### **Foundation Knowledge:**

They had pointed out that this program provides foundation knowledge of library system and gives basic knowledge of library and information science especially to those who did not have any background of studying library science in their previous degree program. The professionals belonging to Karachi University, Sindh University, and Punjab University who had studied 2 years in two parts i.e. BLIS or PGD (Lib. & Inf. Science) and MLIS were very well aware about one year program whereas the graduates of other library schools did not have any idea about the program but they discussed the issue in the perspective of M.A. (previous) courses which are almost similar to the courses offered in one year program. A participant of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad clarified that the BLIS program of his university is equivalent to graduate level program so he would talk on MLIS (previous) program. According to him, in the first year of AIOU's MLIS the basic techniques of librarianship are taught and the concept about organization of knowledge, management of libraries, circulation and reference services is made clear. The participants of Bahawalpur, Multan, Quetta, and Peshawar also endorsed the views of graduate of AIOU. They said that they also have no experience of studying two programs in two years and had completed their 2-year degree under one program but they can comment on first year courses. They opined that the courses taught during the first year provide necessary



knowledge of librarianship and after studying all the courses, one can work professionally in a library come what may he/she is a degree holder or not.

### **Technical Correspondence Knowledge**

The course of library correspondence, technical and report writing is offered in Karachi University and a similar course of Professional Communication is offered in Punjab University hence the participants belonging to both of these universities were of the opinion that postgraduate program in library science gives knowledge of handling technical correspondence. The participants of all other universities are deprived of such a course. They observed that although they have studied the course of communication skills but that course does not cover the office correspondence with special reference to libraries. They further said that the library manager or administrator who is professionally qualified, has to make liaison with the world outside the library as well as with the higher authorities and subordinates but he/she is not properly trained or educated about different formats or styles and writings. They also cannot use particular office language in different documents or letters written so such a course is need of the time and all the universities should make it a part of their curricula.

### **Referencing Knowledge**

The participants of almost all the universities were of the opinion that the postgraduate program gives knowledge of referencing. All the participants observed that the role of reference librarian has always been considered as an important role as he/she not only provides the exact and accurate material to the reader but also provides information about the required material to the user, if the same material is not available in the library. The participants agreed that although the contents of the course of reference and information sources and services are fulfilling the requirements of the candidates but more and more electronic and digital sources should be included in the course. The graduates of Peshawar University complained that this important course is not being offered in their university as a result of which the professionals of Peshawar University face problems in coping with the situation related to referencing. Another Peshawar University professional belonging to Hazara Division admitted that they cannot provide reference service to their readers in its real term.

### **Library Technical Services:**

The program enables the graduate to perform cataloguing and classification manually and electronically. This course is also taught in all the universities; somewhere theory and practical separately and somewhere jointly. The graduates of AIOU, Baluchistan University, and Peshawar University observed that their universities are also teaching advanced technical operations besides theory and practice of classification and cataloguing, hence this program is strengthened by these courses.

### **Awareness about Different Types of Libraries:**

The majority observed that the program also provides awareness about objectives, functions, responsibilities and activities of different types of libraries. The participants of Central and Southern Punjab who had studied two separate programs (BLIS and MLIS) in two years were of the view that the BLIS program develops an understanding among the young scholars who are going to join the profession of librarianship about the basics of the field. The participants of Baluchistan, Karachi, and Islamabad observed that after studying one year (come what may it is

a complete degree or not), the graduates are eligible to discharge all professional responsibilities in a library so they can attain the target of running a library perfectly and professionally. The participants of Sindh and Peshawar also showed their agreement to the opinions of other participant with a slight difference that if a university is awarding one-year degree, it should also impart a practicum of at least three months to make the student eligible for degree.

### **Learning and practical:**

The participants opined that since majority of the core courses are included in the curriculum of postgraduate studies, hence the program is rich in learning as well as practical. The participants of Sindh, Karachi, and Punjab remarked that the program should be continued even if the four year BS program is started/continued as those who are graduated from the colleges or as external candidates and want to join the profession of librarianship, avenue for the professional education should not be closed for them and they continue their postgraduate studies. The participants of Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta commented that during the first year of MLIS (referring to BLIS or postgraduate diploma program), there is great opportunity of learning the basics of profession as well as the students are also trained to get practical knowledge of maintaining different sections of a library.

### **Practical and market:**

Majority agreed that the practical courses fulfill the requirements of the market to a large extent. The participants belonging to Bahawalpur and Sargodha stated that there is a large number of libraries in the surrounding of these two cities. Although most of the libraries are of academic institutions but there are also special and public libraries and Islamia University and Sargodha University are facing the challenge to produce librarians compatible with the market needs. To meet the needs of the market these universities and other universities have designed their curricula harmonious with the needs.

### **Traditional librarianship learning:**

There were some views that the program carries comprehensive approach of learning traditional librarianship. The participants of Sargodha University were against the viewpoint as according to them, their university is offering some modern courses like online information retrieval, information literacy instructions, and information technology. They agreed however that besides these three courses, the others are promoting traditional librarianship. The participants of other universities were of the view that majority of the courses taught in their universities are traditional ones but some modern courses like use of computers in libraries, information technology etc. have also been included in the curricula.

### **Computer Skills:**

There were some opinions that the postgraduate program provides basic computer skills. The participants of Punjab University, Sargodha University, Islamia University, Allama Iqbal Open University, Peshawar University, and Baluchistan University were of the view that the program enables the learners gain basic computer skills to be used in libraries whereas developing websites or library programs and software are not taken into consideration in BLIS program and all such expertise are given in final year. The participants opined that giving more emphasis to computer skills and technology at the cost of library skills will not be suitable as we are producing the graduates of library science and not the computer science. The participants of

almost all the universities endorsed this point of view and observed that no doubt, the computer skills are essential in every field of life but the basic necessities and proficiency in the concerned field should be at the top priority. The participants of all the groups agreed that whatever is taught with respect to computer knowledge and skills at BLIS or equivalent level is enough and reasonable.

### **Theoretical knowledge:**

The overall general estimation was that the program is full of theoretical knowledge about new trends of library science, besides the old, traditional and classic concepts of the subject. The participants agreed that the program covers the basic knowledge of cataloguing, classification, collection development, reference sources and services, bibliography and bibliographic control, library administration and management, library operations etc. Hence the program is rich in imparting theoretical and conceptual knowledge of the subject. The participants belonging to Karachi, Punjab, Sindh, and AIOU were of the view that their universities are also providing practical knowledge of the core subjects. The remaining participants advocated this version and observed that the universities of Peshawar and Baluchistan are also focusing on Research Methodology and Library Marketing whereas these subjects are offered at MLIS or equivalent level in other universities.

### **Weaknesses of one-year postgraduate program in LIS**

The participants agreed that there are lots of weaknesses in the postgraduate program which need to be rectified. During the discussions, the following weaknesses were identified:

#### **More theoretical, less practical:**

There was a general consensus in almost all the groups that a lot of theoretical material which is delivered in the classrooms should be replaced by practical implications of those concepts such as acquisition procedure, circulation and library operation. The nature of all these courses is practical-based rather than theoretical so these should be more practically performance subjects rather than long theoretical details. The representatives of Sindh University were against the version. They commented that their university is focusing more on practical as there are courses at this level on applied classification, applied cataloguing, library automation systems, research methodology, information literacy etc. and all these courses are practical-based. The other participants replied that their universities are also focusing on practical in the course whose nature is purely practical-based but here we are talking about the courses which are partially of practical nature but this small fraction of practicability is ignored. On this reply, the participants of Sindh endorsed the version of other universities.

#### **Neither theoretical, nor practical:**

Another view about some of the courses offered in this program was that the courses of library and society, communication skills, and library correspondence or professional communication do not give any knowledge either theoretical or practical. The participants of Punjab, Peshawar, AIOU, and Sindh opined that whatever is taught in library and society is not actually observed in the society. So many roles of library with respect to different quarters of the society are discussed but in fact, those roles are not experienced anywhere. Similarly, the representatives of Baluchistan and Peshawar commented on the course of communication skills or library correspondence. They observed that with respect to these courses, the ground realities are not

taken into consideration and the realities are that most of the students belong to the middle or lower middle classes who have completed their schooling from government or Urdu medium educational institutions. Majority of the students having such background, cannot write something in an impressive style either in Urdu or English. Their base is weak and up to postgraduate level, they cannot improve their weakness. The courses of communication skill or professional communication are designed for postgraduate level whereas the students cannot have ability to write even equivalent to Matric level hence the courses are of no use for them. The difficulty here is that they cannot be taught from the introductory or fundamental level. Moreover, the use of SMS language (Romanized or English) has also multiplied the deterioration of text, grammar, spellings, abbreviations, formats, etc.

#### **Core courses augmentation:**

Some participants belonging to Baluchistan, Sindh, and Islamia University were of the view that these programs do not include such courses that make the students technologically literate like computer-based courses to supplement the basic core courses. They further explained that at BLIS or equivalent level, the computer literacy is either unavailable or at very initial level. According to them all the courses of librarianship should have a blend with information technology. They suggested that the courses of classification, cataloguing, indexing, abstracting, bibliography, reference sources and services, collection development, etc. should be designed in such a way that support implementation of modern technology.

#### **Eligibility Criteria:**

Another participant raises question on the eligibility criteria to enroll the students for BLIS program without having any background qualification in graduation or intermediate level. This point of view was endorsed by almost all the participants representing all the provinces. They were of the view that none of the universities restricted the admission and all the students having second class Bachelor degree in any discipline can apply for admission. There is no pre-requisite or no condition of any sort. (The participant of Sindh University pointed out that Sindh University has abolished postgraduate program and replaced it with BS program so all intakes are Intermediate and no other condition is applied).

#### **No know-how of the Subject:**

The point of eligibility criteria was further elaborated by a participant from University of Baluchistan by adding that most of the intakes in this program do not know the basics of the subject and even do not have any idea about the objectives of the subject and are plunged into field as they did not have any other choice. This point was backed by most of the participants representing Sindh University, Islamia University, Sargodha University, and Karachi University, who were of the opinion that the university authorities also do not take the issue seriously and allow admission to anyone whether having interest in the subject or not. As a result, most of the students admitted in the program, do neither pay attention nor take interest in their studies and by collecting notes from one source or another, qualify the exam. The participants of AIOU, and Punjab University proposed that admission test at department level should be conducted and interviews of the qualifying candidates should also be taken so that the aptitude of the candidates may be assessed. The representatives of Sindh and Punjab suggested that the evaluation/examination system should also be modified so that the actual learners can qualify.

**Lack of additional activities:**

Another opinion was about lack of additional activities which are the part of professional discipline like library science. The participants of Karachi, Sindh, and Peshawar were of the view that the professionals rarely take interest in attending or organizing seminars, workshops, conferences etc. The representatives of Baluchistan, Sargodha, and Peshawar complained that the professionals do not or very rarely contribute articles in national or international journals which indicates their lack of interest towards research. The participants of Peshawar, Baluchistan, Islamia, and Allama Iqbal Open University pointed out that extension lectures during their studies were never arranged due to which they remained deprived of gaining knowledge from the experts of the field. The participants of Karachi University and Punjab University explained that extension lectures by the renowned professionals and educationists, holding seminars on different burning issues related to the field and workshops to supplement lectures should be a regular feature of the library schools so that the learners become aware about the latest developments in their field.

**Lack of demand of Profession:**

Since ours is a professional field so a participant from Sindh University pointed out that there are limited opportunities of conducting seminars, refresher courses, symposia, and regular library visits. Some other professionals from Peshawar University, Karachi University, Baluchistan University observed that the students should also visit publishers, and eminent booksellers and printing and publishing houses to have congenial relations with other elements of book world. The participants of AIOU suggested that visits of different types and sizes of libraries will enhance the practical knowledge of the students, which is presently lacking in almost all the professionals.

**Presentation Skills:**

All the participants except Punjab University and Karachi University were of the view that presentation skills which develop confidence among students are missing in this program and due to the same reason, the students do not perform well either in interviews for job or at any other forum. The representatives of Peshawar University and Baluchistan University clarified that due to the local culture of KPK and Baluchistan, the people's personal appearance, and communication accent is a great barrier in their presentation and communication skills. They were of the view that although they are highly qualified but majority feels shy in elaborating their point of view before other people or in interview.

**Proposed changes in BLIS program**

The participants had brought different views with them about the changes in BLIS program. Although this program is active only in one university i.e. University of Karachi whereas all other universities have merged it with 2-year Masters program but most of the participants who belonged to Punjab and Sindh, were the product of this program as universities of Punjab and Sindh were practicing BLIS and MLIS programs some 8-10 years ago.

**Change of Title:**

The participants of all the groups were of the view that the program title should be changed to postgraduate diploma (PGD) as practiced in some of the universities but rest are naming it BLIS which is confusing as why once again Bachelor of LIS after B.A, B.Sc or B.Com or Allama

Iqbal Open University's BLIS. The participants of Baluchistan University and AIOU were not satisfied with the contents of the courses taught at BLIS level. They proposed more and more ICT-related courses and the courses of advanced librarianship.

### **More Traditional, Less Modern:**

Most of the members of the groups representing Islamia University, Sargodha University, and Sindh University had some reservations on the courses and observed that the approach of traditional librarianship is the most influencing element in almost all courses of BLIS. They opined that these courses should be modernized and the courses like History of Libraries, Library and Society, Foundation of Librarianship should be merged and only one course should be developed by incorporating the contents. Similarly, the group members of Punjab University and Islamia University were of the view that the course of Bibliography should be merged with Bibliographical Control.

### **Traditional-Modern Balance Needed:**

The participants of all the groups observed that the traditional courses should be minimized or merged as there is a need to be balanced with at least 50% of modern and current trends in librarianship. The members of Punjab University, Karachi University, and Islamia University commented that the ratio between modern and traditional courses should be 70 and 30 but the participants of Peshawar and Sindh universities opposed and said that the importance of traditional courses cannot be ignored so the ratio should be 50:50.

### **ICT-related Courses:**

The participants of Punjab University, Islamia University and Sargodha University proposed that at least two or more full-credit courses must be added to provide the CIT (Certificate in Information Technology) level of computer related understanding. The participants of Karachi University, Sindh University, and AIOU were not in favor of giving more credit to the computer related courses as the library professionals should focus on librarianship and not on computer technology.

### **Merger of Theory and Practical Courses:**

There were suggestions from the group members of Punjab, Sargodha, Karachi, and Sindh to merge the theory courses of classification and cataloguing with the practical courses of same and in place of vacant courses, more management science courses should be accommodated.

### **Course of Library and Society:**

About the course of Library & Society, it was proposed by the participants of Karachi and Sargodha that since it is just a topic or merely a chapter so this course should be covered under some other relevant course and this vacant place should be given to some other practical-based or computer-related course.

### **Cataloguing and RDA:**

The participants representing Punjab University, Sindh University, Islamia University, and AIOU were of the view that card cataloguing has been obsolete and AACRII has been replaced by RDA and most of the libraries worldwide are switching over to RDA whereas we, in most of the library schools, are still practicing card cataloguing and AACRII. In favour of RDA, the

participants of these groups mentioned its merits which are not in AACRII and one of the examples is including all the names of authors come what may they are more than three authors.

### **Suggestions about incorporation of new courses in BLIS**

There were a number of suggestions from the participants regarding inclusion of either new courses or the contents of the courses. Although there was duplication or overlapping in the suggestions of different library schools or different provinces but the suggestions were valid.

#### **Professional Written Communication:**

The participants of all the groups showed their grave concern over the deteriorated performance of the professionals especially the fresh graduates who cannot draft an office routine letter in English which shows their inability in spoken and written English. To overcome this problem and lacking of the professionals, the participants suggested addition of a module on English language. This may be a complete course or a part of course.

#### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills:**

Some participants representing Sindh University, Islamia University, Karachi University, and Punjab University suggested adding sessions on learning and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills which will help develop the reading habits as well as identifying and entertaining the needs of the readers.

#### **New Role of Librarian:**

Redefining the role of a librarian, the participants of Punjab University, Sargodha University, Islamia University, AIOU, and Karachi University were of the view that in the new century, it has been completely changed and now to guide the readers, a librarian must perform as an information literacy teacher. The libraries cannot keep them out of the modern inventions and innovations so the emerging technologies should be adopted by the libraries.

#### **MARC Cataloguing:**

It was proposed by the group members of Peshawar University that MARC cataloguing should be applied in detail.

#### **Modern Styles of Lecturing:**

The participants of almost all the universities except Punjab University and Karachi University politely criticized the traditional styles of delivering lectures and suggested that methods of lectures should be designed in such a way that will help students develop interpersonal skills. Although the use of computer has become the basic necessity in every walk of life including libraries, the participants stressed that the training of computer applications should focus on LIS-related activities rather than general activities. (This was just the opinion of some of the participants and the researcher had denied it).

#### **Updating Curricula:**

Since the modern technologies especially related to ICT have changed the objectives, services and responsibilities of the libraries and librarians, so the participants of Peshawar, Sargodha, and Baluchistan universities were of the view that curricula need to be redesigned with redefined objectives. The participants opined that rapid changes in information environment are also

changing the society and new trends i.e. information management, information literacy instruction etc. are emerging as new areas in the field of librarianship so these topics are taken into consideration for incorporating in the curricula.

### **Change of Nomenclature:**

Participants of Sindh University, Karachi University, Peshawar University, and AIOU pointing out towards the change of name of department as information management, observed that merely the change of name is not enough, a number of courses of information management will have to be included.

### **Merger of Core Areas:**

The participants of Sindh, Karachi, Peshawar, and AIOU further said that the core areas will have to be condensed/merged especially classification, cataloguing, and collection development should be condensed. By condensing and merging, more space for new courses can be generated. In the curriculum designed by HEC, the course of Information Literacy Instruction has been kept in optional courses whereas, according to the suggestions of participants of AIOU, Peshawar University, Islamia University, Sargodha University, this should be a compulsory course.

### **Course on Knowledge Management:**

In the present age, the role of librarian has become the role of knowledge manager so the course of knowledge management should be designed and incorporated in the curriculum. These suggestions were given by the representatives of Punjab University, Baluchistan University, Karachi University, and Peshawar University.

### **Other Suggested Courses:**

According to the suggestions of the participants the other courses which should be included in the curriculum are information management, information storage and retrieval, and data mining etc. The participants suggested that ICT-based contents should be put in the existing contents of courses. They also recommended including the courses of communication skills and personality development. These may be two separate courses or a single course which are being offered by some library schools but not by all. Another suggestion which was received was about ALA Romanization Table and the participants agreed that it is a standard for the purpose, so it should also be included somewhere.

### **Suggestions about removal of courses from among the existing curricula**

The participants of majority of the groups were well prepared about pointing out the courses which should be removed or adjusted somewhere else in the curriculum.

### **Course on Collection Development:**

The group members of Sargodha University, Punjab University, Islamia University, and AIOU were of the view that the course of collection development should not be offered as a complete and detailed course but it should be made a part of some other course.

### **Course on Library and Society:**



Similarly, the participants of Karachi University, and Sargodha University emphasized that the course of library & society should be condensed to a chapter or two and it should be made a part of any other course.

### **Suggestions for improving the quality of education of library schools**

The participants applauded, commented and criticized openly in a friendly atmosphere the ongoing professional and educational services and activities of library schools of the country. They opined that as far as the theory and practical courses are concerned, almost all the library schools are doing their best to produce professional librarians to serve the nation but everything is not up to mark.

#### **Study Tours Strengthen Knowledge and Concept:**

The majority of the participants observed that the students are not well aware about the functions, responsibilities, and activities of different types of library as they have rarely visited the libraries to critically monitor them. So the participants suggested that frequent study tours of different libraries should be arranged on regular basis so that the students can well decide their interest in any particular type of library.

The participants observed that we are not competent enough in the modern courses especially those which have automation and computerization requirements. For these courses, we should either train our graduates with the help of experts of field or should hire the services of IT personnel and experts. Another area which is snubbed in the curricula of most of the library schools is archival material so the attention should be paid while developing and updating curricula towards archival material, their preservation, techniques of preservation etc.

### **Key Findings**

#### **BLIS/PGD Program (Merits)**

- One year program is encouraged as it contains all basic competencies which are required to run a library.
- Core areas are well covered.
- Provides knowledge of handling technical correspondence and knowledge of referencing.
- Imparts trainings of manual and electronic classification and cataloguing.
- Both theory and practical areas are covered which meet the market requirements.
- Full of basic computer skills.

#### **BLIS/PGD Program (Demerits)**

- More stress is given on theory rather than practical.
- The contents of some of the courses are very weak.
- Core courses are lacking ICT skills.
- No eligibility criteria for admission to PGD/BLIS.
- Lack of additional/supporting activities like seminars, symposiums, extension lectures etc.

#### **Proposed changes in BLIS**

- BLIS program should be rephrased as PGD-LIS.
- Ratio between traditional and modern courses should be 50:50.

- A short certificate course in IT should be included.
- By merging courses, space may be created to accommodate more professional, computer-based and management courses.
- RDA should be introduced to replace AACR2 and card catalogue.

### **Inclusion of new courses (proposed)**

In all the meetings, the following courses or the sections of courses were identified to be included in the curricula:

- Digital content management
- Digital repositories
- Media library management
- Internship
- Master thesis should be compulsory
- Basic statistics courses
- Management course has some lacking especially financial management
- Evidence-based training/learning
- Research techniques/methods (how to organize a research activity?)
- Digital management
- Metadata management
- How to teach your library users?
- Library planning for each and every type of library. It should include market-based requirements
- Library software should be a complete course
- E-communication
- Skill development
- Archival preservation techniques
- Personality development
- Information literacy instructions
- Information management/knowledge management
- Data mining
- Social tagging
- Online cataloguing
- Cloud computing
- RDA
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning skills
- Architecture of library building
- Functional English courses
- Leadership skills
- Human resource management
- Implementation of networking
- Collection development of electronic material
- Bibliometrics / Webometrics
- Dublin core
- EndNote software
- E-subscription
- Project management

- Event management
- Interview skills

### **Exclusion of courses (proposed)**

In the light of suggestions of the participants, the following courses are identified to be fully or partially removed from the curricula:

- Collection development
- Library and society
- Courses of literatures and information sources
- WINISIS
- History of libraries and books
- Cataloguing of special material
- Bibliography and bibliographical control

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

- Frequent study tours of different libraries should be arranged.
- Optional courses on libraries and librarianships should be offered to all the students.
- Duration of course of digital library should be enhanced to two semester or one year.
- LIS departments should be under Faculty of Management & Administrative Science.
- Annual system should be replaced by semester system.
- IT experts should be hired to teach the courses related to IT.
- Attention should be paid to introduce course on archival material.

### **Conclusion**

Conducting focus group interviews for the ongoing research was a very arduous but interesting experience. The target population (the library professionals working in different types of libraries of the whole country) had showed their willingness to be the part of different focus groups according to their convenience and availability. Arrangement of co-host or assistant was also not a difficult job as some of the students of the researcher, had voluntarily accepted the responsibility. All the six sessions of the interviews were held in a very peaceful, friendly, and professional atmosphere. The participants were well-aware about the activity and were well-prepared as they had been provided with the necessary documents and information almost ten days in advance. In the start of every session, the researcher briefed the participants about the discussion which would be confined to the questions already framed earlier. The co-hosts also assisted the meetings by taking notes and recording with the help of voice recorder. As a result of six meetings of focus group interviews, very informative, useful, and enlightening suggestions were found from the active representatives of all the provinces and federal capital. The participants were not only representing the entire country but also all the library schools of the country so their suggestions are of great worth for getting the key findings for this study. Since all the meetings were very successful in which the opinions of practicing professionals were sought so the findings of these interviews were incorporated in designing the aforesaid suggestions and proposed courses. These suggestions are worthwhile and can be presented before the concerned authorities to be implemented.

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