

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM: THE NEEDS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Discusses the present situation of libraries and the needs for library and information science (LIS) education in Brunei Darussalam. LIS education at the tertiary level has not been established in Brunei. Many libraries do not have qualified library staff. Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) Library, being the biggest library in the country, undertakes major initiatives in assisting development of other libraries by providing training and consultancy, and conducting LIS courses. The development of LIS education in Brunei Darussalam looks promising although establishing it at tertiary level will be a great challenge to educators and librarians alike.

Keywords: Library science education; Information science education; Librarianship; Brunei

LIBRARIES IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Brunei Darussalam is a small nation with a population of less than half a million. Its economy depends mainly on the production of oil and natural gas. Libraries in Brunei Darussalam, compared to those in its neighbouring countries, do not have a long history. The first public library was founded in Kuala Belait in 1953. The earlier libraries, which served the public, were established under the auspices of the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the Malay Language and Literature Bureau).

Special libraries are found in nearly all government ministries and departments today. Some of these special libraries may allow use by the general public, but many require the people to seek official permissions before using their libraries. The Brunei Shell Petroleum Company also has its own library serving its own special needs.

All schools have libraries. They range from a classroom converted into a library to purpose-built libraries. Vocational and technical schools, colleges and institutes have more developed collections of resource materials but apart from

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the Brunei Institute of Technology College, none has qualified library staff. In 1956, the first Brunei Teachers' Training Centre (BTTC) was established, and later the college's purpose-built library was constructed in 1979. The BTTC was renamed the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Teachers' College in 1972, and then renamed as the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education in 1984. It merged with UBD in 1988. UBD Library, the only university library in Brunei Darussalam was founded in 1985. It is currently the most modern and the only fully automated library in the country. There is no national library in Brunei Darussalam.

CURRENT SITUATION OF LIBRARY WORKFORCE

In Brunei Darussalam, individuals who wish to pursue a career in library and information science at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels have to do them abroad as such programmes are not offered locally. The majority of them studied in educational institutions in the United Kingdom and Australia. However, the interest in studying LIS courses is not widespread due to the lack of publicity regarding the profession and there is a general belief that library management does not require specialised or professional qualification.

There is currently a total of twenty-three librarians who possess bachelor's degree up to doctorate qualifications in library and information science in Brunei Darussalam. The libraries that have qualified staff are Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Institute of Technology, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the Legal Department and the Ministry of Education. Qualified librarians do not staff the rest of the government schools, special libraries and college libraries.

The non-existence of professional library staff in the majority of libraries has a great implication on the communities they serve. New students who have gone through the information skills course conducted by the UBD Library remarked that they had never or hardly used the school library catalogue or the school library materials to support their studies. Obviously, these students are at a disadvantage when they carry out their research at the university level because they have to start from scratch with their information searching skills.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROGRAMMES AT TERTIARY LEVEL

The rapid development of information technology and the stress on knowledge-based economy means the importance of libraries in nation building can no

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longer be ignored. Inputs from library professionals on how libraries are planned, designed, and managed are vital if libraries are to serve the communities effectively. Today, library users have become sophisticated and demanding when it comes to their information needs. Without qualified staff to plan and manage libraries, it will be difficult for libraries to develop and serve their clients satisfactorily.

There is a general realisation among Bruneian librarians that the formation of library and information science education in Brunei Darussalam at tertiary level is necessary not only to produce qualified librarians and information professionals but also to bring up the name and status of the librarianship profession in the country (Francis, 1988). As early as 1986, the writer had indicated the possibility of setting up an LIS tertiary education programme in Brunei Darussalam (Tahira, 1986). However, it was only in 2000 when the first formal LIS education course at the national diploma level was established (Tahira, 2002)

(a) National Diploma in Information and Library Management

Currently, the only formal LIS programme available in Brunei Darussalam is the National Diploma in Information and Library Management offered by Sultan Saiful Rijal Technical College. The idea of implementing the National Diploma in Information and Library Management in 2000 came after years of planning by several Bruneian librarians who were conscious of the needs to give the non-qualified library staff opportunities to undertake formal LIS education. Initially, this programme sets out to cater for the experienced library staff that has never undertaken professional education in library and information science. However, it is hoped in the near future, the course will be opened to school leavers who would like to enter the library and information science profession.

The duration of the National Diploma in Information and Library Management programme is two years. The subjects studied are as follows:

- Applied Computer
- Mathematics for National Diploma in Library Management
- Language and Communication
- Library Management I & II
- Collection Development I & II
- Reference Services I & II
- Information Retrieval I & II
- Final Project
- Common Skills

By 2002, the programme had produced fourteen national diploma holders.

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(b) Universiti Brunei Darussalam Library's Initiatives

The largest pool of qualified librarians is found at the UBD Library. The librarians at UBD as a whole are aware of the shortage of graduate librarians and have worked on the proposal to establish graduate studies in library and information studies education at UBD. The UBD Library, in tune with its status as an academic library and the biggest library in Brunei Darussalam, has always been providing library training, short courses and consultations for other libraries, as follows:

- Short courses

In light of the non-availability of LIS education in the country at tertiary level, the UBD Library initiates various short courses pertaining the library and information science field for library staff from various libraries within the country. Courses that had been given include Internet searching, publicity and promotion of library services, collection development, cataloguing and classification, the development of the Bruneiana and Special Collections and on other ICT related subjects.

- Work training

Work training or placement is also offered to library staff from other libraries within the country. The training may take a couple of days to a few weeks. The trainees are rotated to each section of the library and they are under the supervisions of qualified librarians. Usually, all aspects of the library management are covered unless there are special requests to cover only certain areas of the library system.

- Library Consultation

UBD Library also offers consultations to other libraries for their development. Currently, it is assisting in the development of the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha Hospital Library.

- Proposed Library Module

In 2001, the Universiti Brunei Darussalam Library proposed a library module called Management of School Libraries / Resource Centre to be included in the B.A.Education and B.A.Primary programmes held at the Sultan Hassanah Bolkuah Institute of Education, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. The aim of the course was to produce educators who are able to set up school libraries and library media center according to the principles and basis governing such set-ups. Among the subjects taught were library and resource center design and planning, budgeting, cataloguing and classification, collection development, publicity and promotion and information technology.

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However, the proposal did not materialise as eventually it was decided by the governing body of the university that the course be called Information Searching Skills in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) under the B.Ed. Primary and B.A.Primary Education. The course aims to equip students with information searching skills for language learning and to help the school library to be the hub of the language learning process. The course contents are Resources (print and non-print); Organisation of Knowledge and Information; Sources of Information; Organisation and Management of School Libraries/Resource Centers.

(c) Prospects

The UBD Library has made further efforts in proposing the implementation of library and information science education at UBD.

- **Master of Library and Information Science**

Realising the urgent needs for more qualified librarians and information professionals and the fact that currently, there are no candidates undertaking the subject at the undergraduate and graduate levels overseas, the UBD Library had proposed the Master of Library and Information Science degree course to be undertaken by UBD.

Its objective is to educate and to upgrade the knowledge and skills of current local library information professionals, to offer other graduates who are interested in the LIS field and to produce a pool of new LIS graduates in order to meet the needs of libraries.

The intentions of the programme is to provide professional education for a wide variety of services and management careers such as in libraries, information agencies, the information industry, business industry, government, research, and similar environments where information is a vital resource. The curriculum is designed not only based on the present but also probable future characteristics of LIS professions. Emphasis will be on essential knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes that are needed by new professionals in these fields.

The course will cover basic subjects in the field of library and information science but students will also be given the opportunities to specialise in particular areas of the field. This will enable them to enter a variety of careers. Examples of careers outcomes for the Master of Library and Information Science Degree holders are as follows:

- Archivist
- Book Publisher
- Database Administrator

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- Information Officer
- Information Retrieval Specialist
- Reference Librarian
- Information Subject Specialist
- Knowledge Manager
- Manager of Library/Resource Centres
- Manager of Information Organisations
- Medical Informatics Specialist
- School Librarian
- Technical Services Librarian
- Web Librarian
- Youth and Children's Librarian

The programme description and degree structure will be presented at a later stage as soon as tentative approval can be reached. The programme is intended mainly for graduate level (masters degree) training in professional librarianship and information services. The minimum entry-level requirement would be a B.A. or B.Sc., or even a B.B.A. or B.Ed. (or their equivalent) in any discipline. The degree can be completed either by coursework or by research (dissertation).

The duration of the Master of Library and Information Science programme is normally two to two and a half years full-time (not including the internship period); and three to three and a half years part-time (excluding the internship). It is proposed five years is the maximum time allowed for completion of the degree.

• Diploma in Library and Information Science
Conceivably, the programme could also offer diploma or certificate in library and information science (similar to the Postgraduate Certificate of Education), which might take one to one and a half years to complete. This programme needs to be worked out. However, UBD Library is currently concentrating on the proposed Master of Library and Information Science programme.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the current situation of the libraries in Brunei, the initiatives of the UBD Library and the prospects of LIS education at the tertiary level in Brunei Darussalam. LIS education is slowly developing in Brunei Darussalam and librarians themselves are taking the responsibility in making the relevant bodies aware of the need to set up library and information science education in Negara Brunei Darussalam. As a whole, Brunei Darussalam

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librarians are aware of the current trends in the development of LIS education around the world and the urgent needs to set up a formal LIS education at the tertiary level. They look forward to their own home-grown graduate librarians who will be able to develop the libraries effectively and contribute to the development of the country.

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