

Crisis of LIS education in Thailand: a survey

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Abstract

LIS Education, in 21st century, undergone a paradigm shift than just an incremental development through its theories and practice, caused many uneasy tensions. The paradigm shift is due to invention of technology and its use in library development and services, reflecting directly or indirectly on LIS education. The present study perceived that crisis is the next stage of confusion and hence made an attempt to gather the opinion to derive core factors that are responsible for crisis of LIS education in Thailand, using a structured questionnaire, administered among faculty in LIS and the working professionals, considering a judgement sample of 52 professionals. The core factors of academia are derived based on the literature, they are infrastructure, curriculum, growth of LIS Education, theory and practice, standards/ quality assurance/accreditation, governance, research, title of the LIS course and students' interest in the LIS course.

Keywords: LIS education; Crisis; LIS professionals; LIS faculty; Thailand.

Subject Heading: Library and Information Sciences--Education--Thailand



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Introduction

Thomas Kuhn (1962) in his book "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" stated that crises in scientific disciplines are due to paradigm shift. The post-modern paradigm shift has changed the basic assumption of the education in almost all the fields due to invasion of technology, and more so in LIS education both in theory and practice. Also it is due to the tendency of discarding old theories and practices, getting into new, based on technology application in all walks of library practice, reflected directly or indirectly on LIS education, thereby caused crises. The crisis of librarianship has been addressed by many researchers, about all types of libraries including academic, research, public libraries and others, noticed many new breed of professionals and designation. Google search (searched as a phrase) "crisis of librarianship" as on 05-12-2013 yields about 1,650 results (0.42 seconds).

Davis (2008) in his work "Librarianship in the 21st Century-Crisis or Transformation?" addressed many of aspects, specifically the transformation "the symptoms of the crisis are outward signs of a deeper transformation which is taking place within the profession. This transformation is demonstrated by an evolutionary shift within the discipline from Library Studies to Information Science to Knowledge Management." The crises and criticism were on all aspects like course title - 'library science' or 'information

science' or else what (many questions); designation of librarians; specialization requirements; duration of course study at different level like post +12 certificate course, diploma course or the post-graduation degree/ diploma and master level or even research based M.Phil. or Ph.D.

1. Why crisis

The Crisis (vulnerability) is not new in LIS education, reflected in many studies/survey on LIS courses, curriculum, reflective to job market and closer/merger of LIS course. Stoffle and Leeder, (2005) found that the dissatisfaction in library education is nothing new; library practitioners have long been vocally critical about both the curriculum and the state of library education as a whole. Curry (1999) found "closure of several U.S. library schools in the past decade has certainly engendered a feeling of vulnerability among Canadian schools" and "Survival tactics include joining another unit of equal size and entwining the programs so that each is indispensable to the other". Also the study found that three schools are sheltered within a pre-existing unit-Dalhousie is secure within the Faculty of Management; McGill and Alberta moved into their Faculties of Education. The school at Western Ontario joined with Journalism to form a new Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

Also found many Cooperative Masters Programs (curry, 1999) to share courses at the master's level like Internet course delivered to MLIS students at the University of Alberta was offered by the Faculty of Education's Information Technology Group. At Dalhousie, faculty members encourage MLIS students to consider registering in the technology or management courses offered by the other three schools within their Faculty of Management. University of British Columbia, the school offers two separate degrees – a Master of Library and Information Studies and a Master of Archival Studies. Students from either program may take, within limits, courses designated primarily for the other. Of late, LIS jobs are increasingly technology-driven and some of the positions supposed to be for LIS professional are filled by non-LIS professionals. Hallam (2006) mentioned that shelf life of university qualifications is reducing, so the need for individuals to continually upgrade their skills” and that is why “Individuals at all levels of the workforce are having to take responsibility of learning for their long-term employability” (Nicolson, 2001) and “contextualize overall academic environments of LIS education (Hallam, 2006). Questions at this context are - can we cover all the related aspects of market needs for all types of libraries and technological changes like public libraries, medical libraries, corporate libraries and fast changing technology application in LIS course, or does it

require to provide foundation course, or conduct co-operative course with related discipline or introduce specialization course with career-long learning needs of the profession? Of course, there are some positive actions initiated like joint discussions on the structure and contents of LIS curriculum (EUCILD Project Report, 2005) ASEAN regional collaboration to improve the quality of LIS education (Khoo, Singh, and Chaudhry, 2006) and regional accreditation scheme (Majid, Chaudhry, Foo, and Logan, 2002). But these initiatives are not clear about the major components getting into the LIS curriculum (Chaudhry ,2006) like knowledge management and information system. Further to clarify whether LIS schools are ready for such inclusion of the additional component in to curriculum (Chaudhry, 2005). Hu (2013) found that new positions related to information technology skills and knowledge is created and it has critically impacting the educational programs in library and information science. Matthew and Pardue (2009) found from the content analysis of ALA's Job-List that many jobs expect knowledge of web development, project management, systems development, and systems applications. Riley-Huff & Rholes (2011) found many new designation, they are digital librarian, systems/automation librarian, emerging & instructional technology librarian, web services librarian, electronic resources librarian, database manager, network librarian, distance education librarian. Most important finding

(Riley-Huff & Rhoads, 2011) (table -8) that 54 out of 93 advertisements are not filled with the comment that “We had difficulty in getting an applicant pool with adequate skills”.

All these literatures are yet to define the boundary of LIS education to the present context or generalize the concept, course name, nomenclature of the course or even the designation of librarian and career prospects. Hence keeping all these issues in view, the present study attempts to gather general consensus about the core factors of academia which is affecting LIS education in Thailand, by conducting a survey.

2. Parameters and framework of the study

The parameters and framework of the present study is based on many literature (particularly based on Potsdam, 2003; Dillon and Norris, 2005; Devis, 2008; and White, 2009;). Potsdam F (2003) pointed out the crisis varying in severity from country to country, and stressed that there is “a lack of consensus on the nature of librarianship”. Also the study has posed many questions - Can we get there from here? Can library education and information science coexist in harmony without detriment to either or must they divorce? Can the American Library Association and the LIS schools work together to produce a national core curriculum? Can we revamp the accreditation system so that it is based on nationally agreed standards? Can we

reconceptualise librarianship to make it attractive to future generations of librarians? White (2009) in his study “Are you LS or IS?” called this as marriage of the two programs in his survey to find answer to questions - (1) how LIS students perceive the fields of information science and library science, and (2) their perceptions of how information science differs from library science, the study indicated the results that “students perceive differences in the job activities and social status of librarians and information scientists, understand the theoretical connection between the fields, and consider the distinction important.”

Dillon and Norris (2005) evaluated what is crisis? and pros and cons of calling it as crisis, and about closure of LIS schools. The arguments are like it is pushed to techno-centric, no understanding on needs of practitioners including nature and content of curricula. Dillon and Norris (2009) traced the origin, argument and counter arguments in his literature review that Michael Gorman, president of the American Library Association (ALA), addressed, as part of election platform, as “crisis” and reiterated by editorial pages of *Library Journal*, claims that crisis is incorrect. However the argument quoted (Dillon and Norris, 2009) on claims and blames of crisis that “Ostler placed blame on the lack of suitable leadership” “Paris placed the blame more on the lack of status and connectivity” and other blames quoted are “relative stability and even growth for LIS

programs” “new technologies have pushed issues of access, use, and organization of information to center-stage” and “curricular problems, lack of relevant research, gender inequity, and an obsession with technology”. Also they identified three, as central theme “lack of research on library issues, since schools have given all their attention to technologically oriented research questions”, “gender divide issue” and curriculum. Finally they argue that “the lack of formal definition is an indicator of the dynamic nature of the profession and that claims of a host-parasite relationship between librarianship and information science are misleading and represent a failure to recognize the shift in the practices and needs of librarianship within a technology-rich cultural environment.” The present study chose the parameters suits to core group of LIS education.

3. LIS education in Thailand

LIS education in Thailand (as per the study of Premsmi.P) started in 1900 as a part of teacher’s training school. The major initial programs in LIS education were started at Chulalongkorn Universtiy, and actual LIS education was started in the year 1951, under Fulbright scholarship, as short term courses, for five years and in 1955 first library school, as part of faculty of arts, with a Diploma course and undergraduate program (1957), and Master program(1964). Majority of these programs were based on Library schools of America

with little modification to suit Thailand. The subjects introduced were library history, library Administration and practical classes on classification, cataloguing and reference services. Later courses were started in various universities, Thammasat University (1960), Srinakhinwariot University (1965), masters program in Chiang Mai University. In 1970s five library schools and two teacher training schools were started. In 1980s Bachelor Degrees were offered by 14 Government universities (out of 24), 41 Rajabhat Universities , 4 (out of 57) private universities started the courses, majority degrees were either B.A or B.Ed, called as Library science or information science or Information studies (vary few called the degree as library and information science). Master Degree program were started in 10 (out of 24) Government Universities (M.A. or M.Ed), Open universities (Sukhthai). The Doctoral program was started in Khon Kaen University in 2003 and in Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in 2006.

Professional development in Thailand indicated a good progress with university library standards (1980), National Information system (1988), 13 major branches of national library, including special information centers and data banks for National Economic and social development. The consortia called ThaiLIS and Thai Library Association are very active in Thailand. The **designation for LIS professionals** in Thailand are librarian, information specialist, curator, information manager, audio-visual specialist and

computer system analyst, as per the survey conducted by Department of Library Science, Chulalongkorn University (1995). The **curriculum structure** depends on policies and regulations of higher education institutions affiliated, where Ministry of Education approves.

The study design

The present study is designed to elicit the opinions of LIS faculty and qualified LIS practitioners working in universities. In context of this study, study recognized two groups-active group and passive group. **Active group** are those who directly involved in academia and practice i.e., teaching staff of LIS education and practicing librarians, **passive group**, on the other hand, (not involved directly in teaching and practice) include students, research scholars, the policy makers and the administrators. This study is confined to active groups. Opinions were gathered using structured questionnaire during summer of 2013, using judgment sample of 52 LIS professionals. The sample of respondents from active group comprises teaching professionals (professors - both in-service -1 and retired-1, Associate

Professors-7 and Assistant Professors-31) and practicing professionals (University Librarians-2, Deputy librarians-1, Assistant librarians-9). The response for analysis was grouped in to three viz. **Sample A-** All the 52 respondents, **Sample B-**Policy participation – includes Professors, Associate Professor, University librarians and Deputy librarians and those above 25 years of experience (12 participants). **Sample C -** Execution/ feedback group includes Assistant Professors (31) and Assistant Librarians (9) and those below 25 years of experience. Core factors considered for the study are infrastructure, facilities, curriculum, research, standards / accreditation, LIS Theory and Practice, course title and students' interest in LIS course.

1. Limitations of the study: the study has undertaken to study only active group of the LIS education and it is not addressing the market demand.

2. Analysis and interpretation of the study: The analysis of the study is tabulated based on the three sample groups and presented in Table -1, Table-1(a) and Table-1(b)

Table -1 : Response to various factors

Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N= 12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
Response to infrastructure and facilities				
a)	Lack of teaching staff	28 (53.8%)	7 (56.3%)	21 (52.5%)
b)	Lack of Infrastructure	22 (42.3%)	5 (40.3%)	17 (42.5%)
Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N= 12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
Response to relevance of curriculum				
a)	No harmonization of curriculum among LIS schools	26 (50.0%)	5 (40.3%)	21 (51.5%)
b)	No periodic revision	13 (25.0 %)	4 (33.2%)	14 (35.0%)
c)	Lack of innovation in curriculum	29 (55.8%)	11 (91.3%)	26 (65.0%)
d)	Curriculum fails to address adequately the education requirement of librarians	17 (32.7%)	6 (50.0%)	25 (62.5%)
Response to type and quality of research				
a)	No quality research	26 (50.0%)	6 (50.0%)	16 (40.0%)
b)	More of quantitative research	28 (53.8%)	4 (33.2%)	20 (50.0%)
c)	No theoretical research / lack of relevant research	16 (30.8%)	6 (50.0%)	19 (47.5%)
d)	Less research output	30 (57.7%)	3 (25.0%)	20 (50.0%)
Response to standards/ accreditation				
a)	No accreditation agency like in USA	24 (46.2%)	2 (16.6%)	15 (37.5%)
b)	Quality assurance body not created	22 (42.3%)	7 (58.3%)	19 (47.5%)
c)	Quality assurance body created but not in operation	24 (46.2%)	9 (74.9%)	19 (47.5%)
d)	No established standards	25 (48.1%)	5 (41.6%)	19 (47.5%)

Table 1(a) Response to various factors

Response to LIS theory and Practice				
Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N=12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
a)	Mis-matching between theory and practice	23 (44.2%)	0 (0%)	13 (32.5%)
b)	Rift between LIS teachers and librarians	18 (34.6%)	4 (33.2%)	26 (65.0%)
c)	Less / no practice of internship	31 (59.6%)	3 (25.0%)	21 (52.5%)
d)	Mismatching between knowledge of students and employers needs	37 (71.2%)	6 (50.0%)	16 (40.0%)
e)	Poor understanding about the goals of LIS education between teachers and librarians	24 (46.2%)	2 (16.6%)	20 (50.0%)
f)	Poor understanding about demanding situation of LIS education between teachers and Librarians	20 (38.5%)	9 (74.9%)	18 (45.0%)
g)	Poor understanding about needs of either side (teaching and practice)	28 (53.8%)	9 (74.9%)	24 (60.0%)
h)	Lack of consensus between teachers and librarians about range of subjects to address in LIS education	30 (57.7%)	7 (58.1%)	20 (50.0%)
Response to program title – Library science or Information science				
a)	Loosing territory of librarianship and marching towards Information Science	40 (76.9%)	7 (58.1%)	20 (50.0%)
b)	Traditional LIS subjects are sacrificed and more ICT stressed	33 (63.5%)	6 (50.0%)	18 (45.0%)
c)	Obsession with technology	22 (42.5%)	7 (58.1%)	28 (70.0%)

Response to LIS theory and Practice				
Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N=12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
d)	Too much of nomenclature Jugglery	22 (42.3%)	6 (50.0%)	18 (45.0%)
e)	Information Science is dominant at the expense of librarianship	24 (46.2%)	2 (16.6%)	10 (40.0%)
Growth of LIS Schools (education) and distance education				
a)	Mushrooming growth of LIS schools	34 (65.4%)	9 (74.9%)	20 (50.0%)
b)	Distance education is dominating in LIS education	27 (51.9%)	9 (74.9%)	31 (77.5%)
c)	Failure of LIS schools to market themselves adequately	33 (63.5%)	7 (58.1%)	16 (40.0%)

Table 1(b) Response to various factors

Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N= 12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
a)	No good quality students	27 (51.9%)	7 (58.1%)	19 (47.5%)
b)	Less number of students are opting the courses	27 (51.9%)	5 (41.5%)	21 (52.5%)
Professional governance				
a)	Government apathy on LIS course	23 (44.2%)	5 (41.5%)	11 (27.5%)
b)	Lack of or no role being played by the professional associations	28 (53.8%)	9 (74.9%)	24 (60.0%)
c)	Lack of suitable leadership within the field	28 (53.8%)	8 (66.8%)	19 (47.5%)

Sl.No	Description of elements	Full sample (N=52)	Response from Policy group (N= 12)	Response from Execution group (N=40)
d)	Lack of status in the home universities	29 (55.8%)	9 (74.9%)	20 (50.0%)
e)	Lack of connectivity among other department	35(67.3%)	9 (74.9%)	20 (50.0%)
Response to other aspects of crisis				
a)	Lack of Regional Language publication on LIS	31 (59.6%)	4 (33.2%)	20 (50.0%)
b)	Lacks vision and mission	23 (44.2%)	7 (58.1%)	16(40.0%)
c)	Gender inequality/ Gender divide	12 (23.1%)	2 (16.6%)	10 (25.0%)

3. Ranking of the response: Considering the discrepancy of the three sample group, to present the clarity about the response, a table of ranking the response above 50.0% is tabulated from each group in table-2

Table-2: Ranking based on the response for all three group

Sample A	Sample B	Sample C
1. Loosing territory of librarianship and marching towards Information Science (76.9%)	1. Lack of innovation in curriculum (91.3%)	1. Distance education is dominating in LIS education (77.5%)
2. Mismatching between knowledge of students and employers needs (71.2%)	2. Poor understanding about demanding situation of LIS education between teachers and Librarians (74.9%)	2. Obsession with technology (70.0%)
3. Lack of connectivity among other department (67.3%)	3. Poor understanding about needs of either side (teaching and practice) (74.9%)	3. Rift between LIS teachers and librarians (65.0%)
4. Mushrooming growth of LIS schools (65.4%)	4. Quality assurance body created but not in operation (74.9%)	4. Poor understanding about needs of either side (teaching and practice) (60.0%)
		5. Lack of or no role being played by the professional associations (60%)

Sample A	Sample B	Sample C
5. Traditional LIS subjects are sacrificed and more ICT stressed (63.5%)	5. Mushrooming growth of LIS schools (74.9%)	6. Lack of teaching staff (52.5%)
6. Failure of LIS schools to market themselves adequately (63.5%)	6. Distance education is dominating in LIS education (74.9%)	7. Less / no practice of internship (52.5%)
7. Lack of regional language publication (59.6%) Less / no practice of internship (59.6%)	7. Lack of or no role being played by the professional associations (74.9%) Lack of status in the home universities (74.9%)	8. Less number of students are opting the courses (52.5%) Poor understanding about the goals of LIS education between teachers and librarians (50.0%)
8. Lack of consensus between teachers and librarians about range of subjects to address in LIS education (57.7%)	8. Lack of connectivity among other department (74.9%)	9. Lack of consensus between teachers and librarians about range of subjects to address in LIS education (50.0%)
9. Less research output (57.7%)	9. Lack of suitable leadership within the field (66.8%)	10. Loosing territory of librarianship and marching towards Information Science (50.0%)
10. Lack of innovation in curriculum (55.8%)	10. Lacks vision and mission (55.8%)	11. Mushrooming growth of LIS schools (50.0%)
11. Lack of status in the home universities (55.8%)	11. Lack of consensus between teachers and librarians about range of subjects to address in LIS education (58.1%)	12. Lack of status in the home universities (50%)
12. Lack of teaching staff (53.8%)	12. Failure of LIS schools to market themselves adequately (58.1%)	13. Lack of connectivity among other department (50%)
13. More of quantitative research (53.8%)	13. No good quality students (58.1%)	14. Lack of Regional Language publication on LIS (50.0%)
14. Lack of or no role being played by the professional associations (53.8%)	14. Loosing territory of librarianship and marching towards Information Science (58.1%)	
15. Lack of suitable leadership within the field (53.8%)	15. Obsession with technology (58.1%)	

Sample A	Sample B	Sample C
16. Distance education is dominating in LIS education (51.8%) 17. No quality research (50.0%)	16. Lack of teaching staff (56.3%) 17. Traditional LIS subjects are sacrificed and more ICT stressed (50.0%) 18. Mismatching between knowledge of students and employers needs (50.0%) 19. Curriculum fails to address adequately the education requirement of librarians (50.0%) 20. No quality research (50%) 21. No theoretical research / lack of relevant research (50%)	

4. Finding and discussion: The study found many gaps (Fig-1)

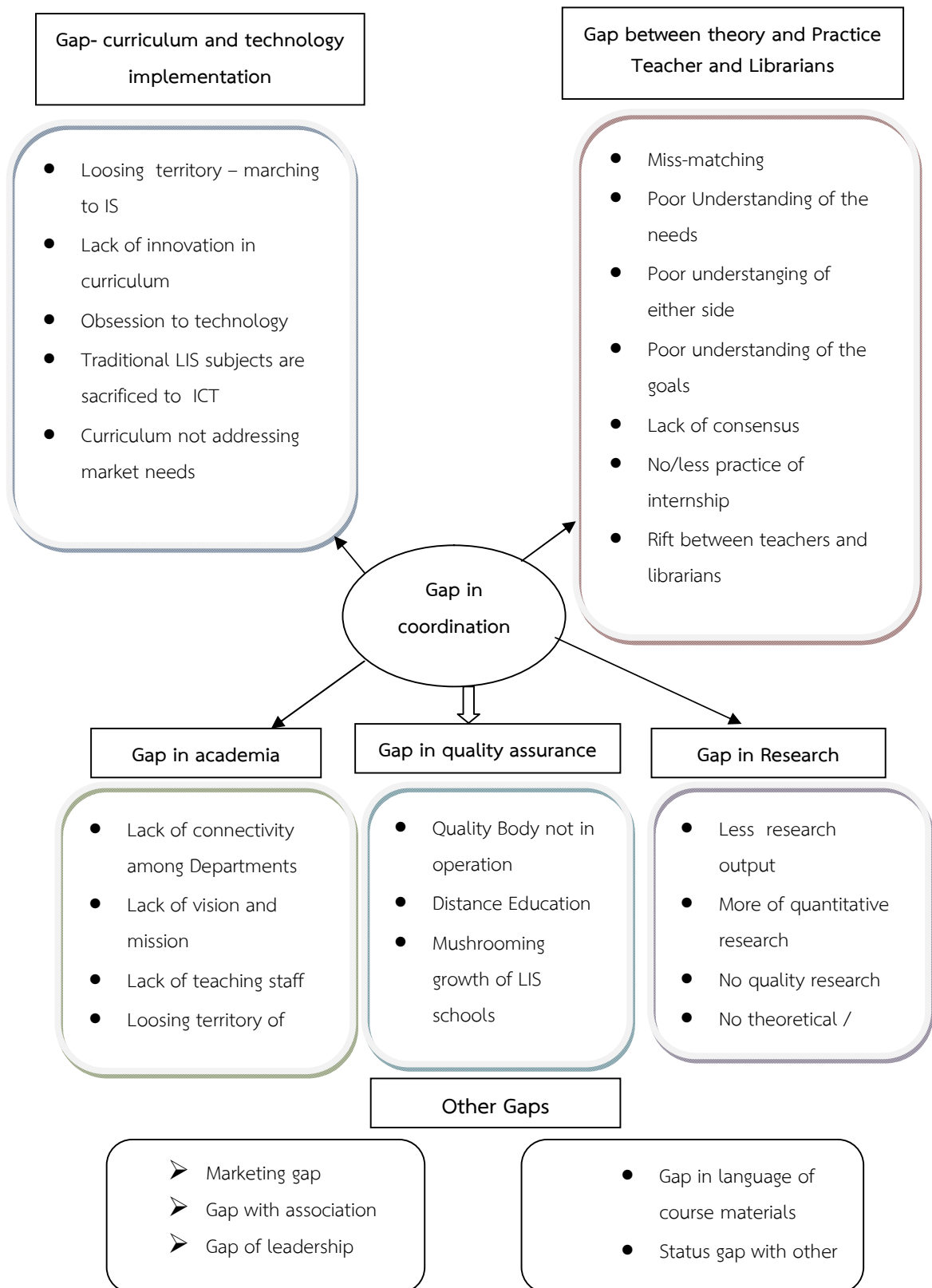


Fig.-1 The study found many gaps

Discussions of the results

The gaps found in the study are between curriculum and technology in practice, between theory and Practice (Teacher and Librarians), in academic culture, quality assurance, research and other gap as well - in marketing, with association, leadership, language of course materials and status gap with other professionals.

The gaps are evident from the present study and the literature reviewed for framework due to technology-intensive development. Many blogs, literature and the seminars are addressing the relevance of the library itself in digital era. Also it is known that the libraries have been front-runner of technology application, correspondingly LIS education is not incorporating same in the courses (from time to time) and update the knowledge of the teachers about implemented technology, procedure and its service in the practicing environment. The technology has affected on the all the components of library like library as a place, library as a resources centre, automation of the librarianship, tools of librarianship like classification to taxonomy, cataloguing as a metadata, ontology for semantics. Also the study noticed that some discrepancy in response between policy level and execution level due to generation gap, communication gap and leadership gap. The basic difference is not only in various aspects, but also in the approach to tackle

the problem (called as crisis in this context). Majority of the literature is identifying the roles of the libraries in context of the technology-intensive approach such as information literacy. White (2004) pointed out that librarians are already playing greater role in helping the development of curriculum, in their respective host institutions for many other domain, that being the case why not LIS faculty use it. The present study point out that libraries should be used as lab to teach LIS and share the expertise and experience of librarians from well established libraries, to keep in touch with the changed approach of librarianship development, in addition to regular and defined internship program.

The other crisis found in the study are universal problem like lack of communication and collaboration between libraries and LIS schools, where Lillard and Wales (2003); Bennett & Simning (2010); Tumbleson & Burke (2010) found that there is lack of formal collaboration and communication among LIS teachers, between LIS teachers and practicing librarians and also lack of collaboration with other profession (Al-Suqri, 2010). Durance(2003) identified in his study 'Crisis as opportunity', that curriculum in LIS schools are to address "*broad-based information environments and information problems, predominantly user-centered, increasing the investment & infusion of information technology into their curricula,*

experimenting with the structure of specialization within the curriculum, offering instruction in different formats, distance education and are expanding their curricula by offering related degrees at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels". It is now becoming important debate as to – how to bridge many gaps to improve curriculum, pedagogy, practical experience, use of technology in providing wide variety of course materials or ‘learn to learn environment’.

Conclusion

In the context of this study, it is to recall that the LIS education was started by practicing librarians and later, teaching departments were created and separated from the library thereby librarians lost ‘teaching competency’ and teacher lost ‘connecting with applications’ (practical environment). Also it is known that ‘one-size does not fit all’, it should not get carried away with just technology component or job demands of the

advanced or big budget library, it has to be careful about the practical needs due to many socio-economic status of the society, particularly of disadvantaged community, where libraries need to provide chance/choice at various level. The present study also suggests that an extensive study is required in view of globalization, to create experts and expertise of LIS students as global products, as emphasized in the slogan “TEACH AND LEARN BEYOND THE NATION” and on par with the other developing countries (Butdisuwan and Ramesh Babu, 2013). The present solution is also to explore ‘Choice based credit system’ and provide choice for the students to learn what they want and what market want.

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