Academic Librarians with Professional Education in Vietnam

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Abstract - In every academic library, quality and efficiency of a library depend greatly on the competences of its human resource – librarians. They are one of key factors that make big impacts on the quality of information services as well as the satisfaction of information users. In that context ,it is important to consider the librarians' staff needs for continuing education and professional development in a changing electronic environment of academic library. In Vietnam, continuing professional education in Library and Information Science has some prominent characteristics. Recognizing this practice of education helps managers, organizations conduct relevant solutions. The aim of paper is outlining the overall picture of professional education in Library and Information Science, including the role of professional education along with some factors, features related to professional education in Library and Information Science. Besides, this paper is also to bring some solutions for enhancing the quality of professional education in academic libraries. This is very meaningful for the developments of academic libraries in today contexts.

Introduction

The rapid development of Internet and the enhancement of applying communication and information technology in libraries not only have brought new opportunities to improve the effectiveness of libraries, information centers, but created new challenges for professionals of Library and Information Science. This leads to the need of improving qualification with the aim of complying with interchangeable working environment and satisfying the high working demand. Therefore, continuing professional education for librarians is the concerned problem these days. The aim of this paper is analyzing some literature related to professional education in Library and Information Science. Besides, the paper also highlights some influenced factors to the professional educational activities in Vietnam. Based on that, some recommendations are given to improve the quality of professional education in Library and Information Science.

The role of professional education in Library and Information Science

Professional education in Library and Information Science isa familiar problem today. However, this problem is still debated and concerned by many researchers, educators, managers and librarians. Many studies show the status of professional education in their countries and some solutions for improving the quality of professional education in Library and Information Science.

Professional development is the process by which professionals keep current the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to function effectively in their profession. It is assumed that to maintain professional competence, the professional must participate in updating activities and continuing education as a fundamental responsibility though librarians' motivation for continued learning involves a mixture of social responsibility, desire for advancement, professional pride, a concern for future libraries, the need to keep abreast of new knowledge and technology, as well as an interest in supplementing professional training (ALA, 1980). Efficiency of a library depends on the competence of its staff. Therefore, it is very important to master the need of academic librarians for continuing education and professional development today.

Darlene Weingand (1999) believed that professional education is the process of activities with the aim of updating knowledge and skills for professionals of any fields. According to Australia Library and Information Association, the professional education includes many types of activities which aimed to supplement knowledge, develop professional skills and career behavior, improve the working capacity of librarians at their contemporary positions. Besides, the professional education is aimed to equip the ability for librarians in dealing with many new challenges and conducting new responsibilities in the future. In librarianship, professional education play a very important role to improve the capacity of librarians as well as enhance the quality of information services in libraries and information centers. It requires every librarian conceive the benefits which continuing professional education brings.

Esharenana E. Adomi, Kenneth I.N. Nwalo (2003) conducted the prospects for continuing professional education of Library and Information Science professionals in Nigeria using Delta State as a case study. By using questionnaire and interview techniques with 51 practitioners made up of professionals and paraprofessionals from academic, public, special libraries and information centers were used in the study. The findings of this study show that Library and Information Science organizations should be more committed to the continuing professional education of their staff and other solutions.

In study of Chan and Auster (2003), 72 explores the extent to which professional development of reference librarians was occurring, based on a survey of 733 professional librarians with reference duties who were working in large, urban public libraries in Ontario. Reference librarians once relied solely on print resources; they can now answer the majority of questions accurately using only Web-based sources. Authors examined that the competencies reference librarians had chosen formal and informal professional development activities to acquire knowledge and they also explored the barriers that might be preventing reference librarians from participating in these activities. In their professional development activities, the most popular topics were related to internet and more than half the respondents studied electronic resources, office applications, integrated library system applications, communication skills and public service skills. Instructional skills and management skills were studied by about 40 percent of the respondents.

Nyamboga (2004)'s study showed the results of a study of training opportunities for library and information professionals in India and how a selection of Indian university libraries are

providing information skills and information literacy programs for their users. The author stresses the need for training the students, researchers and staff to make appropriate use of resources made available in the libraries. Library and information professionals need continuing professional development courses as new ways of providing information resources are developed. The study reveals that librarians conducted library orientation programs (including information on specific aspects such as computer laboratory facilities within the library, library automation and networking activities), although sometimes systems librarians or information technologists undertook this task, in a survey of higher educational institutions in Jaipur.

The biggest challenge facing the library profession today is preparing the professionals to use technology effectively. An academic library professional will be required to serve as an information service consultant with specific information technology skills (Li, 2009). Therefore, academic librarians should have well preparation for these requirements by many ways. There are many types of activities which librarians could conduct such as take part in long-term programs, short-term courses, self reading; write papers for the professional periodicals; take part in professional associations; teach at education facilities as well as establish relationship with various colleagues in order to learn and share information, etc.…

Characteristics of professional education in Library and Information Science in Vietnam

There is some important factors impact on the professional education. The effectiveness of the professional education would depend on three main factors, includes themselves librarians, governing organization and the professional education facilities (see below figure).
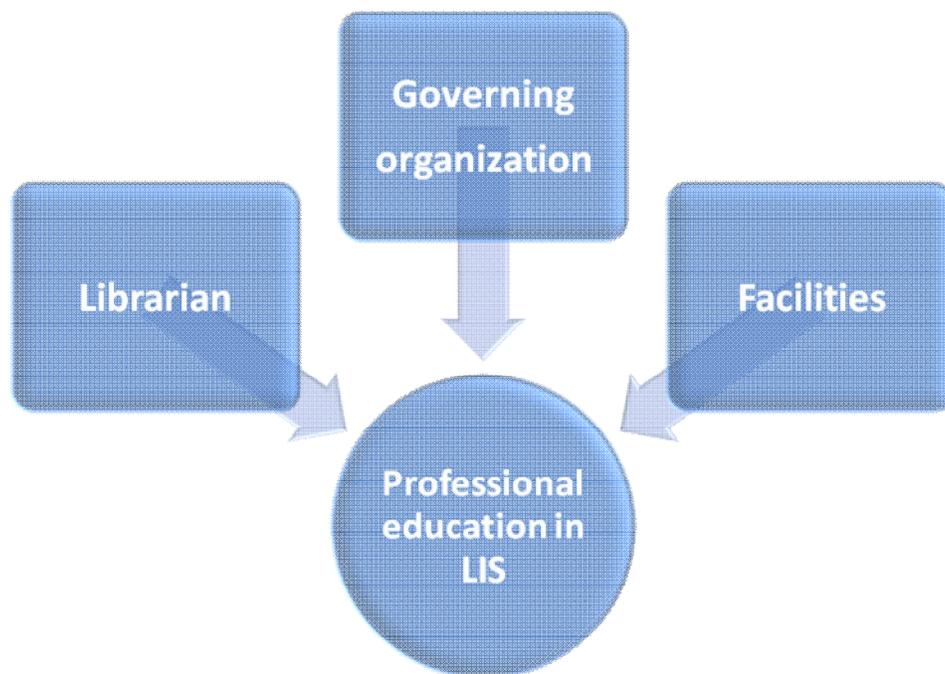
Figure: The factors impact on professional education in LIS

First of all, librarians should concern deeply to develop their own qualification, find and choose actively the most suitable ways and follow permanently with the aim of getting the target of improving their qualification. However, the professional education is a continuing and long term process in which librarians must have been in many obstacles such as having no chance to take part in short term courses and conferences, international short term and conferences in particular; having no time enough to ensure their professional works through the long term courses; having no ability to orient in lasting professional development; have less conditions to apply new knowledge and skills in the reality. Therefore, it would be difficult for the librarians to get high achievement unless they have the active support of governing organizations. There are several specific methods for the governing organizations to encourage the development of staffs' qualification such as considering the professional education is not only a compulsory requirement but a criteria for evaluating achievement award or promoting all staffs. It means that the professional education should be considered as a mission and benefit of all staffs; presenting publicly the staff developing plan in the future with the aim of orientating the professional developing plans to prepare for new missions; keeping up with information about chances to improve the qualification and providing publicly with the staffs; consulting for the staffs in seeking and choosing forms of the professional education; having the finance support policy for the staffs in taking part in long term courses, training courses, conferences, etc..... Besides, managers should master the programs, progresses and outputs of staffs when they take part in the courses in order to adjust the balance between the routine work and the staffs' studying. It is aimed to decrease the obstacles for learning and take advantages for the staffs to apply new knowledge and skills in the reality.

Secondly, one of the factors that influences directly to the effectiveness of professional education is the facilities' ability in organizing these activities. In fact, the activities of the professional education are usually organized by training facilities, library and information service providers, professional associations as well as library and information centers. They must keep pace up contemporize professional education needs and the development strategies in the future of library and information centers in other to organize the professional educational activities effectively and suitably for the requirements of the reality.

With the purpose of conducting well these training activities such as training courses, conferences, seminars, etc.... the organizations that are responsible for the professional educational activities should consider the librarians' characteristics of qualification, psychology, time, and income. The professional educational activities are design to have the necessity, the update to comply with the reality's need in library and information centers. Furthermore, the forms of organizing these activities should be flexible and diverse for the librarians' choices with their conditions and ability. For instances, the online training programs, conferences, seminars, etc. ... are ways which could attract the concern of many people. It is meaningful to the librarians whose obstacles related to their distances and time when taking part in similar activities traditionally.

Beside to the above factors, the effectiveness of professional educational activities also are influenced by other factors such as the pace of library and information career development and

the positions of library and information professionals; the developing speed of information infrastructure; the capacity of the professional associations; the national human resource development strategies, and so on. In general, there are some features of the professional educational activities in Vietnam.

The first feature is that activities' means have not been diverse and inflexible. There have still many traditional forms including: Library and Information science graduate, higher and other programs are organized by the training facilities. At present, there are five training facilities where provide curriculum in library and information science at various educational levels while there are three training facilities where have unconfident curriculums. This is the most suitable method of education for conditions of most of librarians who have need of being improving their qualification. Moreover, the institutional training courses are conducted by library and information centers within some programs, projects. Conferences, seminars, services introductions, etc.… are organized by the training facilities, library and information centers, services providers. Moreover, there are many other ways such as writing paper for professional journals, taking part in consulting activities. In general, the modern and flexible methods such as distance education, conferences, online seminar, online professional forums, etc.… have been not conducted popularly.

The next feature of the professional education related to contents of training activities. It could be seen clearly that the contents of training activities are not really diverse. In fact, the short term courses were focused on basic knowledge and skills while there some courses with new knowledge and skills such as digital libraries, material digitalization, web 2.0 application, full text database building have been organized and concerned. However, most of courses have been organized inside some projects for limited learners. There are some limitations of conferences such as the quantity is less, the contents were coincident, and there is shortage of new, much concerned and difficult problem in the reality. Besides, curriculums of the training facilities are not updated regularly, special in the post graduate curriculum.

Another feature of the training activities are not allocated fairly: The courses that have advanced contents, updated knowledge and skills for librarians as well as big conferences were held in the big cities. Besides, the chances of taking part in the international conferences, practical tours just are held for some limited people. In professional education in Library and Information Science in Vietnam, there is shortage of consistent corporation and long term plan. At present, the continuing professional educational activities have been organized themselves without the consistent activity organisms in national information system. These activities were conducted with the available resources of organizations in Vietnam or grants of foreign organizations. Most resources only satisfy with the short-term needs of library and information centers. Thus, the librarians have shortage of chances to improve their qualifications in order to keep pace with the career opportunities and new missions.

Explaining for this practice, there is an important obstacle that greatly impacts the professional education is that the limited and unstable finance support for the continuing professional educational activities do not satisfy with the practical needs. This is the big obstacle for the

library and information centers in conducting plans and human resource development policy consistently and permanently. In general, the activities of professional education have partly satisfied with the continuing professional education of librarians in Vietnam.

Some solutions for professional education in Library and Information Science in Vietnam

With the aim of improving the effectiveness of the library and information professional education, it should be had some following solutions. Establishing the professional education policy and some consistent activity organic to develop human resources sustainably for library and information facilities in Vietnam. Basing on this policy, it is necessary to adjust the professional education to ensure that chances of improving the qualification of librarians are allocated reasonably in country. Enhancing the participation of the training facilities in the professional educational activities with various ways such as conducting regularly the training courses based on requirements of library and information centers; organizing conferences, seminars about new and concerned questions; changing continuously the graduate and post graduate programs to update new knowledge for learners.

Promoting the corporation between library and information centers, services producers and the training facilities with the aim of discovering the effectiveness of the professional educational activities. For example, it is necessary to focus the financial budgets that support from the international projects/ corporate programs in inviting the international and national professionals to conduct effectively the training activities for most of librarians. At present, "training the teaching professionals" is a method which is concerned by developing countries with the aim of making chances for improving many people' qualification with the shortage of finance.

Diversification of the activities' methods: It is necessary to develop new methods such as online distance training, forums, professional clubs in the internet along with the traditional methods. Improving the quality of activities' contents: Contents of the professional educational activities should be essential and suitable for the requirements of reality in time. To conduct these activities effectively, organizations should conduct surveys to investigate the needs of librarians before designing the contents of the professional educational activities. Particularly, it is very necessary to improve in organizing the training programs of information and technology knowledge and skills as well as telecommunication application in library and information centers in order to help the librarians keep pace with new technology.

Improving the role of professional associations in training the librarians. These associations could confirm the partners' need of education and organize actively or link to organize the educational activities. Developing the professional journals, annals, monographs to make chances for librarians to share and learn new knowledge and skills. At present, there are only two professional journals that issued twice a month. Therefore, these journals should be issued monthly with the aim of improving amount of provided information and enlarging the exchange – forums for the librarians.

Conclusion

To sum up, in recent years, the professional educational activities have much prominent changes of quantity and quality. It could be said that the professional education is very meaningful for librarians to improve qualification capacity and develop the efficiency of academic library. To enhance the qualification level, librarians should keep update and understand deeply the issues that related to their job and career practice their available skills and find out the best way to master new skills and widen knowledge of jobs and focus on training the professional ethics. Along with the traditional knowledge and skills of library and information science, modern professional librarians should have knowledge of information technology, skills of using new technology tools, ability of adapting the interchangeable environment. Besides the efforts of librarians, academic librarians should be much concerned and supported from governing organizations. These requirements help librarians fulfill their roles effectively and providing many better services in libraries and information centers in modern condition.

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