

Quality assurance of library and information Science education in the ASEAN Countries: Moving towards regionalization and internationalization

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to study the status of LIS education and the quality assurance systems of LIS education in the ASEAN countries and to propose strategies for the development of LIS education quality assurance in the ASEAN region. Documentary research was mainly used, supplemented by interviews with key purposive selected LIS persons in the region. Research instruments included a content analysis form and guideline questions for semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data from documents and supplementary interviews were analyzed, synthesized and presented descriptively to answer the three research questions.

Findings showed that LIS education in the ASEAN countries has long history. All ASEAN countries except Cambodia have LIS formal education programs. The government of each ASEAN country established a national accreditation system for higher education programs to assure the quality of higher education providers, and enhance international standards and recognition. Usually the Ministry of Education issued standards, criteria and monitoring system to guarantee all programs offered in higher education. LIS education programs have been under supervision of the National accreditation bodies. There is no specific system/organization for accrediting LIS schools/ education programs and library associations have no authorization to do.

The proposed strategies for the development of LIS quality assurance in the region focus on ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE) and LIS collaborative networking as well as strong support at the policy level of each country and the region as a means of facilitating the internationalization of LIS higher education.

Keywords: Quality assurance, Library and information science education, ASEAN, Internationalization.

Introduction

Quality assurance is one main concern among higher level administrators and educators in ASEAN region to enhance the quality of education, mutual recognition of qualification throughout the region and worldwide. Quality assurance in higher education is defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by a higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved quality. (Harrnan & Meek, 2000: vi). Great efforts have been made to promote quality assurance in higher education in both national and regional levels. ASEAN University Network (AUN), Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) are some key collaborative regional efforts. In the field of library and information science (LIS) education, Khoo ; Majid and Chaudhry (2003) indicated that the issue of quality assurance or specifically an accreditation system for LIS professional education programs in Southeast Asia was raised during the 2001 *International Conference for Library and Information Science Educators in the Asia Pacific Region* held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was felt that an accreditation scheme for the region would be useful in enhancing the quality and acceptability of LIS degrees as well as providing more flexible mobility of library and information professionals in the region. There was a general consensus that some efforts needs to be made in this direction. In 2002, a proposed organization model for the accreditation of LIS education programs in Southeast Asia under the oversight of Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) was presented during the *Library and Information Science Education in Asia (LISEA) Workshop*, in Singapore by Majid ; Chaudhry, Foo & Logan (2002). Subsequently in the year 2003, the issue of accreditation and certification was raised again during CONSAL 2003 conference in Brunei with a proposal for the development and implementation of a regional accreditation and certification scheme as one of the conference resolutions. Anyway, Khoo (2013) indicated that there has been little activity in this area since the early 2000s.

ASEAN which comprised of ten countries in South-east Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. is one dynamic region with great diversity and variation among the countries in terms of geography, culture, official languages, literacy rate, population density, GDP per capita, level of socio-economic development, ICT development, education policies, systems and structures. The diversity has led to richness of culture and resources in the region. Regardless all those differences and from within this diversity, these ten countries share many commonalities and have placed a similar emphasis on human resource development as the key in developing the whole nation and region to enter the knowledge-based economy and global environment. The diversity and similarities impact the development of LIS education in the ASEAN countries and are challenging educators in the region to develop measures and collaborative strategies to assure the quality of LIS education in the region, moving from regionalization towards internationalization. This study will add to the literature relating to library and information science education and the quality assurance system within the context of higher education and the ASEAN region, support the development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and provide the opportunities to strengthen quality of LIS education in the region as well as regionalization and internationalization of LIS education.

Objectives of this study

The purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) to study the status of LIS education in the ASEAN countries,
- 2) to synthesize the quality assurance systems of LIS education in the ASEAN countries, and
- 3) to propose strategies for the development of LIS education quality assurance in the ASEAN region.

Research questions

This study tried to answer three important questions.

- 1) What is the status of LIS education in the ASEAN countries?
- 2) What are the quality assurance systems of LIS education in the ASEAN countries?
- 3) What are the proposed strategies for the development of LIS education quality assurance in the ASEAN region?

Research Methodology

The research approach used was descriptive in nature using documentary research and qualitative procedures to answer the research questions. This involved comprehensive literature review, the study of existing documents, either to understand their substantive content or to illuminate deeper meanings. It was descriptive because it set out to describe and to interpret the existing situation. In addition, the supplementary interviews were conducted with five key informants in the region, purposively selected, using the selection criteria of having experience and involved with LIS education and quality assurance in the region. This was to supplement or clarify findings from documentary analysis.

Research instruments included a content analysis form and guideline questions for semi-structured interviews.

Data collection: A comprehensive literature review related to LIS education and quality assurance, in each country of the ASEAN region was conducted, especially country reports and a summary report of the seminar on *Library and Information Science Education: Collaboration among ASEAN Countries*, conducted at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in 2013 and related official documents of the ASEAN organizations. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate in-depth information and to obtain supplementary information, more data and greater clarity.

Content analysis: a widely used qualitative research technique, was used to collect qualitative data from documents and interviews. It consisted of an in depth analysis by extracting major themes, concepts, key words or features from (textual) documents.

Data analysis: Qualitative data from documents and supplementary interviews were analyzed and synthesized into three key themes. Synthesis was confined to summarizing existing body of knowledge around three specific research questions and to create a more complete picture of findings and present descriptively to answer the three research questions.

Findings

1. Library and information education in ASEAN countries has a long history and plays important roles in the development of the profession, education and society. LIS education is undergoing a complete change through the globalization, the development of economic, political and societal aspects of the ASEAN countries, the paradigm shift of the profession as well as educational reform. The status of LIS education in ASEAN countries can be synthesized as follows:

Development of LIS education LIS first education program in most ASEAN countries started with short courses, training courses, or in-service training for library staff who had no formal education in librarianship. All ASEAN countries except Cambodia have LIS formal education programs. The Philippines holds the distinction of being the pioneer LIS formal education in ASEAN, since 1914, and the School of Library and Information Studies of the University of the Philippines (formerly the Institute of Library Science) is the *oldest library school* in the region. Other countries namely Indonesia in 1952, Thailand in 1955, Vietnam in 1961, Myanmar in 1971, Malaysia in 1972, Singapore in 1993, Brunei in 2000, while Laos is quite recent in 2013.

Foreign assistance played important roles in the founding and development of LIS education in the region, e.g. Asia Foundation (for Malaysia), Colombo Plan (for Myanmar) ; UNESCO (for Philippines), and Fulbright Foundation (for Thailand). Most LIS education was influenced by the western countries, especially United States (e.g. Philippines, Thailand) and United Kingdom (e.g. Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar) ; while some were based on other countries, (e.g. Vietnam from the Soviet system and United States of America, Laos from Thailand and Vietnam).

Levels of LIS education. The programs offered in LIS schools in ASEAN countries can be categorized into certificate/diploma, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree level. Four ASEAN countries namely Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam offer all levels of LIS degree programs, while Singapore offers only graduate programs. Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam offer master's degree as the highest degree in LIS. Laos has just started offering a bachelor program, while Brunei offers a diploma level.

Diversity in the names of the programs, degrees and courses offered. Diversity in the names of the programs, degrees and courses offered can be found in the region as well as in the same country. Library and Information Science dominated the name of the programs while others are Library and Information Studies; Information Studies, Information Management; Information Science, Knowledge Management. There is the trend to change the name of the curricula, **NOT** to include the word "library" in the name of the program/ school to get in line with the changing LIS job market.

Diversity in the status of the LIS institutions. The majority of the LIS institutions are the departments affiliated with the Faculty/ School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Others are Faculty of Education and Faculty of Information Technology/Computer Science. In five countries; Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam the status of some LIS institutions are equivalent to Faculty. Some faculties in Thailand used the name "Faculty of Informatics" which encompass library and information science and other related disciplines, e.g. communication, digital media, animation.

LIS curricula. LIS curricula have almost similar objectives, *in the past* to prepare students for professional work in libraries, *at present* broaden the scope to serve the demands of the labor market, the society's diverse needs both public and private sectors in the digital environment. More and more curricula have shifted from graduate individuals with general knowledge and competencies for libraries to business-oriented and technological-oriented approach and broaden its goals to business or private sectors and entrepreneurs. More interdisciplinary and incorporate perspectives from other disciplines, cover several course works in related subject fields, such as management, business administration, computer science, education and communication.

Mode of teaching and learning. Categorizing the LIS programs according to the mode of teaching and learning, LIS with traditional mode or face to face dominates the field. Open education or distance education mode in LIS have been offered in three ASEAN countries: Indonesia at the diploma level, Malaysia at the master level and Thailand at all levels. The true distance education program in information science in ASEAN which was founded at *Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU)*, Thailand in 1989 is the hallmark of LIS education in the country and in the ASEAN region.

Online learning is at a nascent stage in some countries where LIS education is in the infant stage. No totally online learning leads to undergraduate or graduate degree in ASEAN countries, but a combination of teaching, paper-based, supplemented by online learning. The traditional and open universities had similarities regarding of online learning courses. Both use online almost exclusively as a supplement to existing courses, and used synchronous and asynchronous interaction and offline techniques for the interaction between lecturers and students.

Major challenges to cope with include both common issues across countries, e.g. language barrier, economic barrier, digital divide, shortage of qualified teaching faculty, and the diversity in the development, perception, status and internationalization of the LIS education, profession and professionals in the region. While the development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 provides the opportunities to strengthen cooperation and LIS education development.

2. Quality Assurance of LIS education in ASEAN countries

Quality assurance of LIS education in the ASEAN countries can be synthesized as follows:

National accreditation system for higher education programs. The government of each ASEAN country has its own academic quality assurance system. Usually the Ministry of Education established the national accreditation systems for higher education, issue standards, criteria and monitoring system to guarantee all programs offered in higher education as well as the establishment of the independent organization /agency. Quality assurance also existed at institutional and national levels but different stages of development. There was the diversity of quality assurance systems in the ASEAN region both in the approach, methods and tools used by various quality assurance agencies.

The national quality assurance system of each ASEAN country can be summarized as follows:

Brunei – The Brunei Darussalam National Accreditation Council (BDNAC) was established in 1990 as a sole quality assurance and accrediting body in Brunei. Some of BDNAC's roles are to accredit programmes, qualifications and higher education providers and to implement the Brunei Darussalam Qualifications Framework (BDQF) as a basis for quality assurance of higher education and as a reference point for criteria and standards for national qualification.

Cambodia - The Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) was found in 2003 with the main purpose as stated in the Royal Kret, to establish a legal mechanism for administering the accreditation of higher education for all higher education institutions (HEIs).

Indonesia - The National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (NAAHE) or the official name- Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi, acronym BAN – PT was established in 1994 as a sole independent and authorized accreditation agency for Higher Education Accreditation in Indonesia.

Lao PDR – Center for Educational Quality Assurance (CEQA) or previous name: Educational Standard and Quality Assurance Center (ESQAC) was established in 2008. Its main roles are to develop quality assurance policies and quality assurance system for all education sub-sectors in the country, to develop national education standards for all levels, formulate tools for quality assessment, procedures and set up an accreditation system of the country.

Malaysia - The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), the sole accreditation body was established in 2007 under the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007. It was previously known as the National Accreditation Board which was established in 1997. MQA is responsible for quality assurance of higher education for both the public and the private sectors. With its main role to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) as a basis for quality assurance of higher education and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications, monitoring and overseeing the quality assurance practices and accreditation of higher education programs and qualifications. (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2015).

Myanmar - No centralised national system, quality assurance functions are undertaken by individual universities.

Philippines – Commission on Higher Education (CHED) empowered to establish the current quality assurance system for the higher education sector in 2005, in support of institutions, the academic community and other stakeholders. Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP) made up of 2 agencies and National Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (NNQAA) made up of 3 agencies

Singapore - Quality assurance framework established in 2000. Higher Education Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education (HEQA) oversees quality assurance in Ministry of Education funded universities. Council for Private Education (CPE) established in 2009 to regulate the private sector and build standards in local private education industry.

Thailand – Quality assurance in higher education in Thailand began in 1996 when the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) or at present, Office of Higher Education Commission under the Ministry of Education announced the policy and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education. Quality assurance comprises of internal and external systems. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is the responsibility of the institution and its governing agency while External Quality Assurance (EQA) is the responsibility of the Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) which was established in 2000 under the 1999 National Education Act as a public organisation. In addition, in offering the LIS education programs, there are standards, criteria, frameworks to be followed, e.g. Standards Criteria for Undergraduate Curriculum, Standards Criteria for Graduate Curriculum, and Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd) issued by the National Commission of Higher Education.

Vietnam - Quality assurance for higher education has been developed since 2003 when the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) was set up under the Minister of Education and Training (MOET).

LIS education programs in each country are under supervision of the national accreditation bodies. Three key quality assurance were identified in the study of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) (2012) including 1) external quality assurance through the registering or reregistering of institutions or programs. Often this uses an accreditation approach to a site visit, with a yes or no outcome. Other approaches such as assessment with a value outcome and audit are also seen, 2) rank universities through voluntary or extra accreditation, and 3) internal quality assurance aims to strengthen internal systems and move accountable institutions towards deregulation and self-accreditation. While research on quality assurance in the Asia Pacific undertaken by Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) indicated that three basic quality assurance approaches namely, accreditation, assessment and audit are found in the region.

LIS education programs and institutions follow the quality assurance system of each respective country. There is no specific system/organization for accrediting LIS schools/ education programs and library associations have no authorization to do so. Only the Philippines has "*The Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003*," LIS graduates are required to take the licensure examinations for librarians in order to practice librarianship in the Philippines. In Malaysia, a Standards and Criteria for Programs in Library and Information Science was formulated in 2007, in Brunei and Singapore, representatives of the library associations also take active roles in the advisory board, in development of the competency standard and procedures for accreditation LIS education programs.

3. Proposed strategies for the development of LIS education quality assurance in the ASEAN region.

In the field of library and information science, many regional networks among educators, professionals and activities have been formed in the ASEAN region. Some examples are : Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) which is the important regional network, founded since 1970, Asia- Pacific Conference on Library and Information and Practice (A-LIEP), International Conference on Asian Digital Libraries(ICADL) and Consortium of iSchools Asia Pacific (CiSAP).

The proposed strategies for the development of LIS quality education in the region focus on the following:

1. Two key components of both quality assurance and library and information science should be approached and balanced. For quality assurance of the LIS programs, The ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) which was designed to promote collaboration in regional quality assurance by SEAMO RIHED in 2008 and followed by ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE) in 2011 are proposed to be followed. In terms of library and information science education, a sub-committee which comprised of representatives from CONSAL, A-LIEP and CiSAP are recommended. Regional collaborative effort and networking of LIS educators, programs and institutions and strong support at the policy level of each country and the region should be strengthened as a means of fostering regional quality assurance network and facilitating the internationalization of LIS higher education.

Regionalization Recommended activities for LIS education in ASEAN region based on the synthesis of the literature review and recommendations from “Seminar on LIS Education among ASEAN Countries” organized by STOU in 2013 showed importance of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education. One main benefit of regional collaboration has been in standardization and internationalization of LIS education in the ASEAN countries.

Internationalization. The adoption of international standards is the key to internationalization in policies, curricula, teaching and learning, and professional activities.

2. The quality assurance will comprised of internal and external quality assurance and regional accreditation standards and scheme for LIS education are recommended.

Discussion

1. It was found that quality assurance plays a vital role in the field of education as well as library and information science education at institutional, national, regional and international level. LIS programs and institutions were convinced that quality assurance could improve the quality and acceptability of their degrees. There is an awareness and willingness among LIS programs and institutions to participate in quality assurance scheme proposed by Majid, Chaudhry, Foo & Logan, 2002). This is due to the growing explosion in number of higher education programs and providers as well as increasing competition and commercialization as driving forces that create challenges and urgent need towards quality assurance to ensure that higher education programs maintain the quality and academic standards, credibility, prestige, image, visibility and the accountability to stakeholders.

2. Regionalization and Internationalization have been highlighted to promote quality assurance in library and information science education in higher education. This is in line with Knight (2012) who emphasized that regionalization is seen as a complementary process to internationalization, a process of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education among education actors and systems in a designated area or framework, commonly called a region. In addition, Knight (2013: 15) also indicated that a notable evolution in the internationalization of higher education in the last decade has been the increasing emphasis on regional level collaboration and reform initiatives.

3. Accreditation is strongly recommended in quality assurance of the LIS programs. The issue of accreditation of LIS professional programs has been discussed in regional conferences and workshops for a number of years (Khoo,2004). Majid, Chaudhry, Foo & Logan (2002) proposed accreditation model for LIS programs by modifying the ALA Accreditation Standards to suit the regional situation. In the first phase, the proposed accreditation model will include only Master's degree to be accredited, and in the second phase, the Bachelor's degrees may also be included; CONSAL Advisory Committee on Accreditation (CACA) which is a joint committee of representatives from CONSAL, LIS schools, National Libraries, LIS professional associations and practitioners should be responsible for developing and coordinating a regional accreditation scheme. Once approved, the accreditation status would be granted to the candidate school for a period of three years. Based on the findings, this paper proposed a model for the accreditation of LIS degrees in the Southeast Asian region but this has not been implemented and as Khoo (2013) indicated there has been little activity in this area since the early 2000s. A study should be conducted to find out factors that hinder the success or the implementation of the model proposed.

4. The strategies suggested in this study is in agree with the model proposed by Majid, Chaudhry, Foo & Logan (2002) that the quality assurance scheme will include the graduate program, both master's and doctoral degree to be accredited in the first phase. The difference is that instead of CONSAL Advisory Committee on Accreditation(CACA) which is proposed to be responsible for quality assurance of LIS programs/ institutions, this study proposed the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education (AQAFHE) as the new network and framework designed to promote collaboration in regional quality assurance in higher education and were quite accepted and well established in the ASEAN community.

Recommendations and Implications

Quality assurance and regionalization as well as internationalization of the LIS programs are in response of continuous changes and transformation of higher education and library and information science education. These will maintain quality and global standards of LIS education in the ASEAN region, enhance the mobility of LIS students and teaching faculty in the region, and develop quality and standards of the LIS programs and institutions.

Regional quality assurance system in library and information science education as a part of a Southeast Asian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework, will be used as a means of facilitating the internationalization of LIS higher education. Policy makers in higher education as well as LIS educators and professionals especially in Southeast Asian countries should formulate policy that would be beneficial for the LIS quality assurance, moving from nationalization towards regionalization and internationalization as an integral part of maintaining and improving program's and institution's reputation.

Practical implications

Policy makers as well as educators and professionals in the field of library and information science as well as in higher education in Southeast Asian countries can use a set of strategies/ recommendations from this study to formulate policy that would be beneficial for the LIS quality assurance and will serve as a basis for internationalization of LIS education in the region.

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