Teaching role of the Sri Lankan university librarians in the light of changing pedagogical paradigm brought about by the education policy reforms.

Pradeepa Wijetunge
Director
National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (NILIS)
University of Colombo
Colombo 03
Sri Lanka

Tele/Fax: +9411 2507150
e-mail: director_nilis@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper briefly discusses the environmental threats to public universities with a special attention to Sri Lankan universities. Education policy reforms are used as a neutralising measure by the universities in counteracting these threats. As a result of the policy reforms pedagogical paradigm has changed, bringing the library to centre stage. Librarian's role is subjected to evolution from library specific training to a more subject specific teaching role in providing life long learning skills to the students. However, the extent to which a librarian becomes a teacher depends on the nature of teaching offered by the library. If the library has no opportunity to offer more subject specific information literacy skills programmes, librarians are not in a position to fulfil their teaching role. Necessary conditions for librarians to function as fully fledged teachers and the problems encountered by the Sri Lankan university librarians are discussed. Finally some remedial measures, which will help overcoming these problems, are discussed. Throughout the paper the term "Librarian" will encompass Assistant librarians, Senior assistant Librarians, Deputy Librarians and Librarians.

1. Changing scenario of university education

Universities worldwide are experiencing pressures exerted by their environments. *Globalisation* is a concept, which has become the buzzword in many countries and strategies for globalisation are affecting the universities. There are three major consequences of globalisation on universities; fiscal, cultural and technological (Levin 1999). Moreover *Internationalism* has an impact on the universities. Globalisation and international competition and creation of common markets increase the staff and student mobility. As a result corporate partnerships have to be established among universities.

Economic recession faced by the nations is imposing threats on the universities. Welfare system is falling apart because of the economic recession and this is affecting the university system, which depends on the public funds to a large extent. Universities are experiencing fund reductions from the central governments and they are expected to raise

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funds from other sources. Costs become higher because of increased involvement, increasing costs of new technologies and higher staff salaries etc. Governments often expect to achieve more with less expenditure, as a consequence universities face financial problems.

Information technology is increasingly used to deliver education. The availability of cheap computers and software have revolutionised the teaching, learning, research and administration. Trends like virtual universities and distance education programmes, international research projects and administrative information systems are examples of changes influenced by Information Technology. (Sporn 1999)

There is a trend in certain states to shift from industrial model to *post-industrial economic model*, which characterises information-, service- and technology-based industries. Post-industrial workforce is identified with a matrix of skills that are often referred to as flexible specialisation (Newson and Buchbinder 1988). The flexible specialists in the postindustrial society require three essential qualities; they must possess versatility to apply specialised skills to a wide range of problems and production processes. They have to be more mobile than industrial workers in the previous century, because lifetime employment is not the norm of the post-industrial society. Post-industrial workforce requires a commitment to continuous education.

Demographics are changing in Europe as well as in the other parts of the world. More and more young people are turning towards higher education. Increased numbers of students are from varying ethnic backgrounds, age groups and with different aspirations. Multiculturalism and diversity are emerging and universities need to accommodate these variations.

Many higher education systems, which had tight state control and centralised funding have shifted to a state supervising model and delegated more autonomy to the universities. Nevertheless, universities are expected to be *more accountable to the society*, with the increasing autonomy.

On the other hand, university systems of developing countries have encountered a set of specific challenges. Universities in most developing nations have been built on the colonial models. With a few exceptions they do not have indigenous roots and industrialised countries still substantially control the generation and dissemination of academic knowledge. Third world universities depend heavily on government funds and aid while the governments have a strong control over them. They *lack relevance* to the needs of the country.

There is a noticeable *mismatch between enrolments and resources*. During the past three decades higher education institutions in the developing countries in general have witnessed a large increase in the enrolments but resources have not kept pace with the increasing costs and enrolments. In many countries professional staff is under-utilised, curriculum is overly theoretical and teaching methods are inappropriate. As a result unit

costs are high, dropout and repetition rates are high and completion rate is low. Most in the developing countries are finding it difficult to generate and apply the knowledge needed to meet the rapidly changing requirements of scientific and technological innovations. (Ramson, Khoo and Selvaratnam 1993).

2. Challenges encountered by the Sri Lankan University system

Overall quality of the university outputs is poor. Unemployment is rising among the graduates and only the public sector will absorb them. In part this is due to the lack of relevance of what they have learnt at the university to the needs of the employers (Arulpragasam 1999). Training the youth for employment is a new challenge for the university because they were emphasising only the academic aspects. Now it has become necessary to address the demand from employers (Jayatilleke 1997). The present stereotyped, compartmentalised and subject based courses are seem to be inadequate in meeting the requirements of producing a well informed graduate with the problem solving capabilities required by complex organisations (NEC 1996).

The number of students admitted to the universities was around 4000 in the 1970s and now this figure has increased to about 12,000 (Thilakaratna 1999). Number of universities has increased from 6 in the 1970s to 13 at present. However the quality has not expanded at the rate of the expansion of numbers. Lack of resources has caused a reduction in the quality of university education. Universities are therefore faced with the problem of improving quality and access to universities amidst dwindling resources.

Information Technology has caused a challenge to Sri Lankan universities. The fast changing technology is expensive to acquire and maintain, is quickly outdated and difficult to integrate into existing academic programmes and also it is time consuming and costly to train staff to use technology effectively within the universities. Because of this Sri Lankan state universities are falling behind in using information technology in their courses and university administration.

Deterioration of quality and greater dependency on public funds raises the issue of *accountability to the society* with regard to the activities of the university system. Universities have been isolated islands of academic activities.

3. University Policy Reforms as a strategy to neutralize the challenges

As a principal strategy to overcome the plethora of problems encountered by the universities, higher education policy reforms were brought about by many countries. In 1988, Australian government initiated a number of higher education policy reforms, widely known as Dawkin's reforms which laid stress on consolidation through amalgamation, Participation and equity, reintroducing the fee system, funding

mechanisms and market competition, corporate models of management, institutional diversity and matching higher education to the post-industrial global society. (Meek 2001).

In 1990 the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was established in the USA to create a dialogue among workers, parents and educators to study the changes taking place in the working world, and to determine the skills needed for employment. (Spitzer, Eisenberg and Low 1998). Corresponding to the SCANS Report, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was passed in 1994. This incorporates eight national goals on education.

The British government initiated the higher education reforms by publishing the report widely known as the Dearing Report, in 1997 (HMSO 1997), which made 93 recommendations on how the British higher education should develop during the next 20 years. (NCIHE 1997a, NCIHE 1997b)

In these three countries the emphasis of the education policy reforms was laid on the relevance of higher education to the economic and social development of the country, increasing the cost effectiveness of higher education, use of more IT in education, high quality teaching and learning and life long learning.

Although not in an equal stratum, Sri Lanka initiated its university reforms by launching the University Policy Reforms in 1996 (NEC 1996). Following the recommendations made by the Presidential Task Force on University Reforms (PTF 1997), the UGC promoted a series of reforms in the university system covering Curriculum Reform, Staff Development, Career Guidance Services, Quality assurance and Accreditation and formulation of Corporate Plans and a new Universities Act. The progress was initially slow (during 1998 – 99) but by 2000, the implementation of the reforms had made fairly good progress. (Thilakaratne 2000).

4. Changing paradigms of teaching/learning and Lifelong learning

Life Long Learning is defined as learning from pre-nursery to post-retirement - womb -to-tomb learning. It is important because continuous learning is essential for survival in a changing world. According to the formula $L > C$ where L is the rate of learning and C is the rate of change, individuals who are not learning individuals will be excluded, disadvantaged and will become disaffected. Organisations, which are not learning organisations will fail. (Shepherd 1998)

A move towards the knowledge-based society is driving the universities to prepare their students for the employment market in the information age and life long learning occupies a significant place in the education policy reforms of most countries. *Dearing Report* identifies four skills essential for students; communication, numeracy, use of IT and learning how to learn. The third and sixth goals of the *Educate America Act* stresses

the life long learning of its student population. Australian universities have an institutional policy of seven graduate qualities as the outcomes they seek for its graduates. They also have a similar set of qualities defined for research students and life long learning is one such quality, which they expect from their graduates.

Universities are shifting the pedagogical paradigm towards generating life long learning (Schmidt and Cribb, 2000). For instance the review of engineering education of Australia states that the focus of engineering education will be on creating life long learners, from early education through undergraduate education to continuing professional education, and from generalist to technical specialist (Changing the Culture 1996). This highlighting of life long learning is not limited to engineering, but evident in all disciplines. Australian universities have an institutional policy to of seven graduate qualities as the outcomes they seek for its undergraduates. They also have such a set of qualities defined for research students.

The new pedagogic paradigm emphasises the empowerment of students and encourage them to take control of their own learning. The students become the learner and the teacher becomes the coach. The teacher centred university becomes a learner centred education environment. Teaching is transformed in to the design and management of learning experiences. (Duderstadt 1997-98).
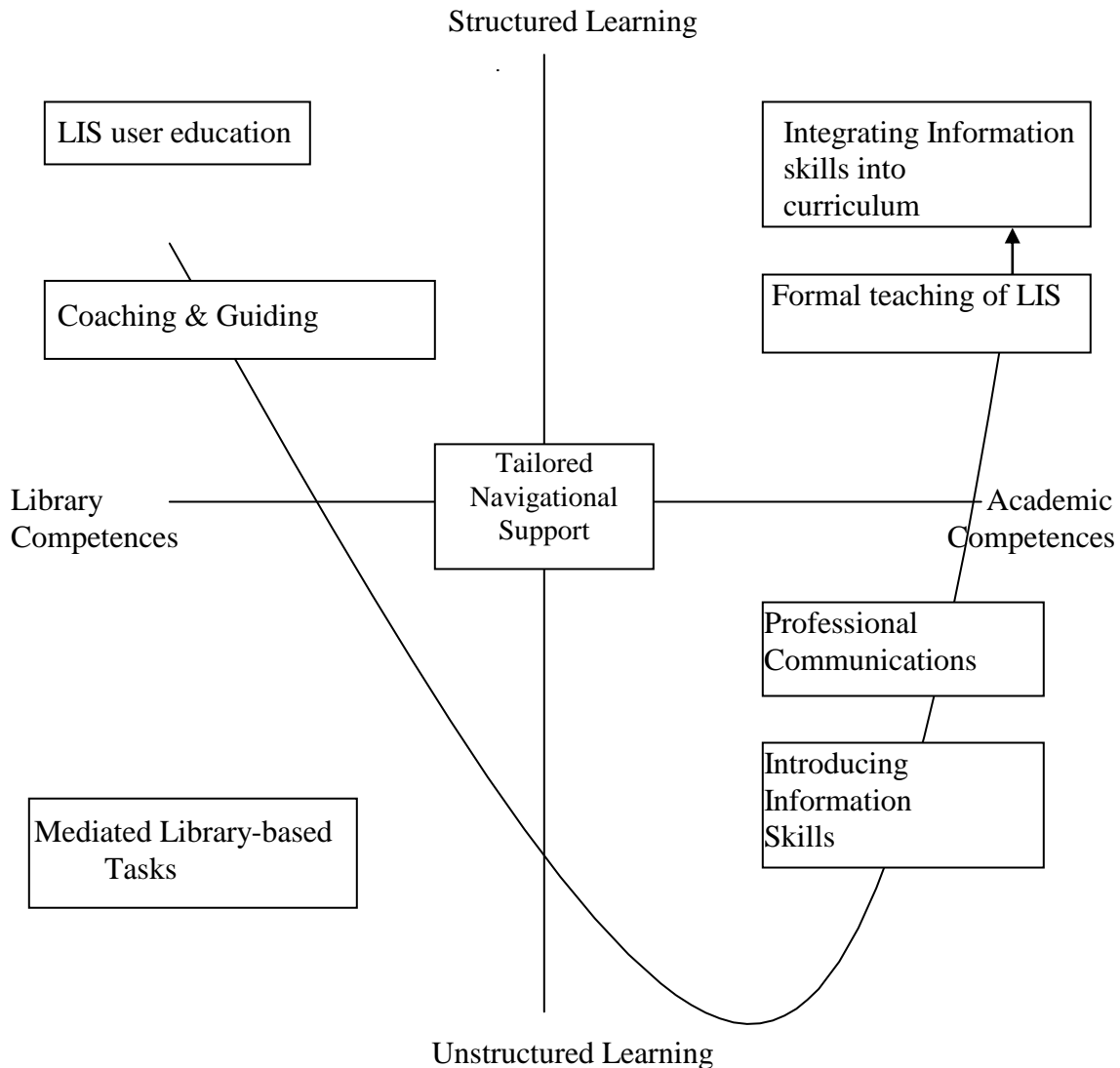
The new paradigm is more concerned with the learner and the learning than the teacher and the teaching and in this learning - centred focus the value of learning by doing is priceless. Teaching is no more lecturing and leading tutorials, but directing the learners to develop their knowledge through providing rich learning experiences. These learning experiences will be provided through new learning paradigms like resource-based learning, problem-based learning, activity-based learning, and the ability of the learner to learn by interacting with the learning resources is the key factor of this paradigm shift. Students will be responsible for their own learning and they will spend more and more time away from the formal classroom, attempting to engage in self directed learning activities. Inactive lecture-discussions where lecturers talk and students listen will fail in this context.

5. Teaching role of the university librarian

Are University Librarians teachers? Any university librarian of Sri Lanka will answer in affirmative on the grounds that paragraph 78 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 asserts that "Teacher" embraces "Librarian" within the context of universities.

However I would like to evaluate this issue in a more theoretical perspective in the light of the university education policy reforms and changing pedagogical styles in higher education. To set the stage for that, in the following section, the teaching role of the university librarian will be examined using a matrix of supportive interaction between the librarian and the information user.

Figure 1 - A matrix of teaching responsibilities of the university librarians

Structured Learning

LIS user education

Integrating Information skills into curriculum

Coaching & Guiding

Formal teaching of LIS

Library Competences

Tailored Navigational Support

Academic Competences

Professional Communications

Introducing Information Skills

Mediated Library-based Tasks

Unstructured Learning

The above figure, which depicts the teaching responsibilities of the university library staff, was adopted from Fielden Report (John Fielden Consultancy 1993, p.25). It explains the activities of library staff along two matrices; the horizontal one relating to the library specific and academic support skills of library staff and the vertical one relating to the style of structured or unstructured support.

Library user education, which involves guided tours around the library, handbooks and group talks is traditional, library specific and more or less print based. It does not require any academic competency but library competences.

Coaching and guiding becomes a key task of the librarian in training and guiding the library staff in a variety of instances; use of computers, explaining work procedures, answering reference questions. On the other hand librarians have a responsibility towards the library users in coaching them to use the library effectively and to locate and retrieve information from other sites whenever the library does not have what they need.

Mediated library-based tasks includes developing and helping with study packs, computer based teaching materials and open learning resource packs. Librarians do not need academic competences but more library specific skills and some interpersonal skills at this stage.

Tailored navigational support is the support given by librarians for the users to reach the most appropriate electronic databases in specific subjects. The core skills required are library specific, but as the numbers of databases proliferates, more specialised academic competences are necessary to evaluate the most appropriate database to suit the user needs. Due to the nature of combined skills required to offer this kind of support it is placed in the centre of the matrix.

Professional communication is another aspect of the teaching role of the librarian. As senior professionals, librarians have to make presentations to fellow librarians and other academics in professional organisations and other forums. These presentations can be on issues related professional affairs, procedures adopted in the library, research findings, professional issues affecting the librarians etc. Audiences vary mainly according to their age, ethnicity, gender, intellectual capacity, knowledge of library procedures, information requirements and depth of knowledge requirements. Therefore competency in powerful delivery of subject matter is essential for librarians.

Introducing information skills is placed in the right segment of the matrix. Subject librarian's contribution to a specific orientation programme designed by the faculty on different information sources, belongs to this category. This kind of support needs Library competences as well as subject knowledge and academic competences. Due to the structured nature of the activity it is placed higher on the vertical matrix.

When the librarians teach LIS students or other students in a formal classroom environment at undergraduate or postgraduate level they engage in *formal teaching* at university level. Under this aspect they are expected to develop and review curricula, teach effectively and assess reasonably.

Integrating information literacy skills in the curriculum is the real zenith of the teaching role of the librarian. To do this librarian needs a sound knowledge of the types of information sources, their location, use and evaluation. At the same time the librarian needs academic competences like curriculum designing, theoretical knowledge of learning and teaching and developing rubrics to incorporate different levels of information skills into the curriculum, working together with the teachers.

The curved line in the diagram denotes the path librarians have taken along with the changing environments of the library. Initially they started with user education, then moved towards introducing information skills and headed towards integrating information skills in to curriculum. This path tends to have started from structured library specific tasks, moved to unstructured library specific tasks and then crossed over to more academic tasks and reached the level of structured academic level tasks, which equals the university librarians with the university teachers.

Librarian becomes a teacher to the extent he/she moves towards the right segment of the matrix offering learner support, which requires more and more academic competences. In the context of Sri Lankan universities, the librarian's teaching role may vary according to the learner support offered by the library. However, it is certain that it does not go beyond the level of introducing information skills.

In order to function as a full-fledged teacher in the university environment, librarians need certain necessary conditions.

6. Barriers for university librarians to practice as teachers

Librarians have a limited understanding of the changing higher education scenario and their responsibilities under the changing teaching/learning paradigms. They do not have a clear picture of the significance of integrating information literacy skills in to the curriculum against "user education" or more glossy term of "customer care". Librarians do not have the necessary pedagogical competencies to perform as a teacher in the higher education environment.

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan university system though emphasises life long learning, has not spelt out formally any guidelines in preparing life long learners or the actual qualities of graduates intended to be produced. A national information literacy policy initiative is still missing. The higher education system, though making valuable efforts to improve the quality and relevance of university education, has not still perceived the necessity to integrate these quality improvement measures with the curriculum. Information literacy skills within the curriculum are not appreciated in Sri Lanka therefore the librarians do not have an opportunity to practice at the highest level of the diagram given above.

7. Initiatives of some other countries to enhance the teaching role of the university librarian

Instances are numerous but two cases from which Sri Lanka can get the message are mentioned here.

The Follett Report (1997) in the UK placed great stress on the increasingly important role, which libraries and other support staff must play in turning the use of networked information resources into an everyday part of teaching, learning and research. Libraries are identified as key agents in the provision of training in the use of these resources. EduLib project (EduLib 1997), which is a recommendation of this report, was expected to provide a national programme of educational development for library and information services staff. The EduLib Development Team sampled current opinion and practice concerning the teaching and learning role of library and support staff and used this to develop a national consensus regarding the nature of the information skills they were attempting to develop. EduLib is a collaborative effort between the University of Hull, the University of Abertay Dundee and SEDA (The Staff and Educational Development Association).

SEDA supported establishing the Staff Development Centre (SDC) at University of Colombo and teachers who fulfill SEDA requirements at completing the Certificate of Teaching in Higher Education conducted by SDC receives SEDA accreditation.

Derived from the Information Literacy standards developed in USA, Council of Australian University Librarians developed the *Information Literacy Standards* (CAUL, 2001) in Australia. "These standards set out not only the need for information literacy, but also that it is a prerequisite for life long learning and is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. They also state that incorporating information literacy across curricula…requires the collaborative efforts of academics, staff developers, learning advisors, librarians and administrators." (Nimon 2002).

Following the EducLib project of UK, Australian universities have developed staff training programmes to enhance their teaching role. For instance Queensland University of Technology, Australia has designed a training programme, which consists of the following elements;

Teaching skills – curriculum design, delivery of subject content and evaluation.
Strategic skills – communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, organizational awareness and policy development.
Professional competency – Information Content knowledge, technological competences and professionalism. (Peacock, 2001).

8. Remedial measures for Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan university librarians are not late to take remedial measures to enhance their teaching role rather than be happy about being teachers according to the Universities Act. In enhancing the teaching role of the university librarians, UGC and NILIS as well as SCOLIS have some key measures to adopt.

To improve the librarians' knowledge of education reforms
1. UGC needs to conduct a one-day seminar for all university librarians, on education policy reforms and the responsibilities of the university librarian in the changing teaching/learning environment, so that the librarians are well informed of the changing higher education scenario.

To enhance the pedagogical skills of the librarians
2. UGC and SCOLIS must enforce and endorse participation of all librarians (with postgraduate qualifications in Library Science) at the mandatory training programme conducted by NILIS. This programme is based on CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (UK)) recommended activities for accreditation of British academic Librarians by the Institute of Learning and Teaching. Six months long course covers the following components.
   1. Teaching and Support of Learning
      - *Developing effective learning environments and learning support systems*
      - *Contribution to the design and planning of learning activities*
      - *Assessment and giving feedback*
   2. Developing reflective practice and being an effective academic
   3. Interpersonal skills and group work
   4. Becoming an effective academic
   5. Seminar Presentations

3. NILIS should make further attempts to offer this course jointly with SDC and to obtain SEDA accreditation for librarians who successfully completes the course.
4. SCOLIS must encourage the university librarians to pursue higher studies at doctoral level.

To raise life long learners at universities
5. UGC should define a set of essential qualities for graduates of Sri Lankan universities in consultation with all national universities.
6. UGC needs to identify a set of generic skills, which will help inculcating the defined graduate qualities.
7. NILIS should provide a training opportunity for higher education policy makers and librarians to be introduced to Information Literacy, with the help of foreign

experts. Regional workshop along this theme, planned by NILIS is a good opportunity for the stakeholders to make use of.

8. NILIS in consultation with the UGC may form a working group and develop a set of National Information Literacy Standards for Sri Lankan universities.
9. UGC should launch a campaign to promote these national standards among the university academics.
10. NILIS should provide further training opportunities for librarians to improve their information literacy skills.

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