

**THE NEEDS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR ACADEMIC
LIBRARIANS IN THE SOUTH OF THAILAND**

Chumchit Saechan

Library & Information Science Department,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus
Jaroenpradit Rd., Muang District, Pattani, Thailand 94001
e-mail: schum@bunga.pn.psu.ac.th

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the needs of continuing education for academic librarians in the south of Thailand and it compares those needs from the perspectives of two groups of people: academic librarians and library directors. The needs of continuing education focus on the technological topics preferences and the study proposes fifty-two topics of continuing education in eight technological categories. The results show that both groups perceive the Internet and Library Automation category as the most strongly recommended topics to be provided in the continuing education of academic librarians. The study also identifies the delivery and incentives preferences that would motivate librarians to engage in continuing education.

Keywords: Continuing education; Academic librarians; Library and Information Science Education; Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Compounding the need for continuing education among the librarians in Southern Thailand is the rapid development and growth of Information Technologies (IT) in the academic institutions. As in other parts of the world, IT has had a profound impact on libraries and academic institutions. Rapid changes in the technologies for handling and distributing information, and the increasing demand of users for information challenge the ability of the academic librarians to assist users. Many academic librarians were educated before the IT courses were taught in library schools, however these academic librarians are expected to use the technology because college and university libraries have been the first libraries in the country to automate library functions and utilize IT tremendously in their information services.

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The implementation of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), Internet access, and networking activities has changed the way users access information. Bhakdibutr and Keesin (1999, 20) indicated “in general, university libraries are much more developed than other types of libraries in Thailand, particularly in terms of recognition, status, services, and technology”. Currently, university libraries, under the Ministry of University Affairs, have fully implemented their integrated library systems whereas other libraries are just beginning to automate individual library functions such as information retrieval and circulation. However, all college libraries, placed under the Ministry of Education, are planning to fully automate and are preparing to join the university networks. College libraries have smaller staffs and budgets so it takes longer for them to be able to finance library automation. But these libraries recognize the necessity of offering access to and using their electronic resources. As the university networks become more developed, they will be able to accept and accommodate the smaller college libraries. Many academic librarians in Southern Thailand completed their formal education before IT was included in the curriculum of Thailand library schools. As such, they have not had much opportunity to learn about IT in a formal educational setting. A survey on planning for computer technology personnel in academic libraries found that there was a need for technological training for 831 academic librarians in 45 libraries (Prediteera, 1995). Continuing education could play an important role in helping academic librarians to update their knowledge and skills in order to assist faculty and students in accessing and using electronic resources. Attending training courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, and lectures and even enrolling in formal degree programmes in library schools are continuing education formats that could provide the means for librarians to study and learn about IT.

Studies conducted on the needs of academic librarians for continuing education in all four regions of Thailand have been quite outdated. Till date no research has: (a) focused exclusively on the perceived needs of full-time librarians working in colleges and universities in Southern Thailand; and (b) compared those perceptions against the perceptions of the library directors. What knowledge and skills that academic librarians need to upgrade? What topics, delivery and incentives preferences would motivate them to participate in continuing education activities? Are the topics, delivery and incentives preferences chosen by the academic librarians are similar to those that the library directors think they need?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Continuing education is a concept of lifelong learning that is necessary to meet challenges of highly accelerated change. Knowles (1950, 21) wrote that for adult education “the first requirement for learning is the desire to learn ... the best time to learn something is when you feel acutely uncomfortable about not knowing it”. He added that one of the greatest problems with adult continuing education is that programmes are often based upon what someone thinks people ought to be interested in, instead of what they really want or need. According to Stone (cited in Horne, 1985), continuing education includes those learning opportunities that individuals in the profession use to:

- a) Keep them abreast of new concepts, knowledge, and skills both within the field and within related, relevant disciplines;
- b) Update their basic education;
- c) Refresh them for changes in personal career lines by providing opportunity for diversification to perform new roles within the profession; and
- d) Enable them to master new conceptions of the profession itself as its membership seeks to discharge effectively the social role imposed on it.

Continuing education is the formal and informal learning by which an individual attempts to update or advance his/her knowledge, attitudes, and skills and thereby enhance total job competence for the present and for the future. In Thailand, formal continuing education is considered to be an education where the person is enrolled in a formal degree programme. Informal continuing education includes workshops, seminars, conferences and lectures.

Research Related to Library and Continuing Education in Thailand

The studies related to library and continuing education in Thailand began with Rauryary's (1979) who investigated the need of secondary school librarians for additional knowledge in Library and Information Science (LIS). School librarians explained that their greatest need was for continuing study at the graduate level. In addition they indicated that they had a lesser need for more scholarly journals in library science. They also wanted an opportunity to visit and study libraries that met professional standards. In the 1980s, five studies were conducted on continuing education for librarians in Thailand. Four of them examined the needs of different groups of librarians and focused on their attitudes, opinions, motivation, problems, and suggestions for continuing education. Rangsigunpoom (1982) focused on library school faculty in universities and teachers colleges, whereas Worakhunpiset (1984)

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studied scientific and technological librarians in Bangkok metropolis. Ratanadom (1983) focused on public librarians, Nonmali (1987) targeted academic librarians. Each study surveyed the entire population except for Ratanadom who used a sample of chief librarians from public libraries and their library administrators in 70 states of Thailand. Nonmali analyzed the relationship between the continuing education subjects and the librarian's position as well as examining the extent of library administrators' support for continuing education.

One study in the 1980s strayed from need assessments—the 1988 study by Krailassuwan (Krailassuwan, 1988). This study examined librarians' and administrators' opinions about the type of librarian development programmes offered in university libraries. In the 1990s, two pertinent studies were conducted on librarians in Thailand; by Loipha (1992) and Thepaya (1997). Unlike many of the preceding studies, these researchers did not focus directly on the need of continuing education in LIS. Loipha examined the role of LIS departments in teachers' colleges and universities in providing continuing professional education for librarians in Thailand. Thepaya focused on the need for continuing education in the field of LIS in the south of Thailand. Because of the small size of the study group, Loipha was able to use the entire population of the LIS departments in Thailand whereas Thepaya used a sample of librarians and staff from the 161 libraries in government agencies in Southern Thailand.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of this study are to investigate the needs of continuing education for academic librarians in Southern Thailand and to compare those needs from the perspectives of academic librarians' perspectives and library directors. The study was conducted on all university and college libraries in 14 provinces in Southern Thailand. The researcher obtained the list of universities and colleges from the Ministry of University Affairs and the Ministry of Education websites. Each university and college was contacted and it was determined that the number of academic librarians was 126 and the number of academic library directors was 62. Since the total number of academic librarians and academic library directors was not that large, this study collected data from the whole study population.

The study used survey questionnaire and case study for data collection. The questionnaires, consisting of 87 questions, were sent to all universities and colleges located in 14 provinces in the South. The questionnaires were addressed and mailed

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to the directors of the identified academic institutions who, in turn, distributed them to the academic librarians.

Survey Questionnaire

The structured survey questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts: information about the topics, delivery, and incentive preferences for continuing education; and personal data to obtain background information about the respondents that would be useful in the analysis of the study. The technological topic preferences used in the questionnaires were developed based on the analysis of courses in the LIS curriculum in colleges and universities in Thailand and the United States, and by selecting topics of high current interest. Additional topics were included based on continuing education courses and workshops offered in the United States, and the needs of Thai academic libraries. The topics then were grouped into eight categories in the questionnaire. The eight categories were the Internet, Website Creation, Computer Software Applications, Library Automation, Networking, Digital Libraries, Electronic Information Searching, and Selected Management Issues. The respondents in this study were asked to rate each item in the category on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strong agree). To check for reliability and completeness of the data collection and the instrument, a pretest was conducted on academic librarians and academic library directors in Bangkok.

Case Study

A case study was used as a secondary research technique to expand on the results of the survey by gaining in-depth information at the Prince of Songkla University, Hatyai campus, and Songkla Teachers' College. These two institutions were chosen because they have the largest number of librarians (30 out of 126) and were at a location convenient to the researcher. The librarians at these sites were asked their reasons for choosing their first, second, and third topic of preferences. The study also sought their delivery and incentive preferences. In addition, they were questioned about how much continuing education they had participated in and what motivated them to engage, or not engage, in continuing education. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0 for Windows was used for data analysis. Frequencies and percentages were applied to identify the preferred topics, delivery, and incentives preferences for continuing education for academic librarians as perceived by themselves, as well as by their academic library directors.

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FINDINGS

The sample in this study involved 188 people, which is divided into two groups: 126 (67.02%) professional academic librarians and 62 (32.98 %) directors of academic libraries in Southern Thailand. One hundred and four (82.53%) librarians and 52 (83.87%) directors responded to the questionnaires. The total response of the two groups was 156 (82.97%).

Topics of Preference

Table 1 presents the ranking of the top 5 topics of interest, from the overall 52 topics, as perceived by the academic librarians. The librarians emphasized the importance of Overview of the Internet and Library Automation (OPAC); these tied as the most frequently selected topics chosen by 94 (90.4%) of them. Library Automation (Cataloging) was ranked second by 92 (88.5%) respondents; followed by Library Automation (Acquisition/Fund Management), Networking and Resource Sharing, and Information Access in an Electronic Environment – all three in the third place. Another three topics were ranked fourth: Internet: Issues and Responsibilities, Networking Technologies, and Online Database Searching. Overview of digital libraries and Using the Web for Reference Service received the fifth placing.

Table 2 presents the ranking of the top 5 topics of interest, from the overall 52 topics, as perceived by the library directors. This group of sample viewed Library Automation (Acquisition/Fund Management) as the most important topic, followed by Overview of the Internet and Library Automation (Cataloging). Two other Library Automation topics, Circulation and OPAC were ranked third. Collection Development and Management was ranked fourth, and Teamwork in Libraries received the fifth placing.

Table 3 presents the first ten topics (1-10) viewed as needed by the academic librarians and the library directors. Both groups chose four similar topics in their top 5 ranking. This consistent views shows that both groups emphasize the importance of topics that deal with library automation and the Internet. However, the topics ranked in the second top five were different. The librarians were more interested in technology-related topics such as on networking, databases and digital libraries, whereas the library directors were more into topics related to library management and such as on collection development and teamwork in libraries. On topics that are related to cooperation and collaboration, it seems that the librarians are interested in

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cooperating externally through networking whereas library directors are more interested in cooperating internally through teamwork.

Table 1: Ranking of the Top 5 Topics of Interest (Librarians' Perspectives)

Rank	Topics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Overview of the Internet	94	90.4
1	Library Automation: OPAC	94	90.4
2	Library Automation: Cataloging	92	88.5
3	Library Automation: Acquisition / Fund Management	88	84.6
3	Networking and Resource Sharing	88	84.6
3	Information Access in an Electronic Environment	88	84.6
4	Internet: Issues and Responsibilities	87	83.7
4	Networking Technologies	87	83.7
4	Online Database Searching	87	83.7
5	Overview of Digital Libraries	86	82.7
5	Using the Web for Reference Service	86	82.7

Table 2: Ranking of the Top 5 Topics of Interest (Library Directors' Perspectives)

Rank	Topics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Library Automation: Acquisition / Fund Management	47	90.4
2	Overview of the Internet	46	88.5
2	Library Automation: Cataloging	46	88.5
3	Library Automation: Circulation	45	86.5
3	Library Automation: OPAC	45	86.5
4	Collection Development and Management	44	84.6
5	Teamwork in Libraries	43	82.7

It is also interesting to note the topics that receive the last five ranking from the overall 52 topics. The librarians chose Website Creation and Implementation, Website Design, HTML, Information Architecture and SGML/XML. The library directors put Website Management, Website Creation and Implementation, Information Architecture, HTML, and SGML/XML in the last five placing. It is important to note that both groups agreed to place Website Creation and Implementation, HTML, and SGML/XML in the last five topics that are needed for continuing education of the academic librarians in Southern Thailand. These topics were probably ranked very low as both librarians and library directors might feel that librarians do not have to possess high level of Internet technology proficiency as

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website creation and maintenance is not the responsibility of the librarians. However, this view might change as librarians are become more involved in developing the library website, creating and cataloging of web resources in the future.

Table 3: Ranking of the Top 10 Topics of Interest by Both Groups

Librarians	Rank	Directors
Overview of the Internet	1	Library Automation: Acquisition/Fund Management
Library Automation: OPAC	2	Overview of the Internet
Library Automation: Cataloging	3	Library Automation: Cataloging
Library Automation: Acquisition/Fund Management	4	Library Automation: Circulation
Networking and Resource Sharing	5	Library Automation: OPAC
Information Access in an Electronic Environment	6	Collection Development and Management
Internet: Issues and Responsibilities	7	Teamwork in Libraries
Networking Technologies	8	Evaluation of Systems and Services
Online Database Searching	9	User Education
Overview of Digital Libraries	10	Internet Security

This study also looked at how the librarians and library directors viewed the continuing education topics in eight categories (the Internet, Website Creation, Computer Software Applications, Library Automation, Networking, Digital Libraries, Electronic Information Searching, and Selected Management Issues). Table 4 presents the topics that are ranked very important by both groups of respondents and receive the first placing in each category.

Delivery Preference

Both academic librarians and the library directors in the South agreed that a university or a college should deliver the continuing education programme for the academic librarians, and should be the location for continuing education. The duration of delivery for each topic desired by academic librarians was three days while the library directors thought that a two-day duration was sufficient. Both academic librarians and the library directors agreed that Monday through Friday was the most appealing time for delivery of topic. Both groups also agreed that summer time was the most desirable time for continuing education. The reason given was that most libraries are not as busy at this period of time.

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Table 4: Topics Viewed as Very Important by Category

Category	Topic	
	Librarians	Directors
Internet	Overview of the Internet	Overview of the Internet
Website Creation	Creating a virtual tour	Creating a virtual tour
Computer Software Application	Word processing	Presentation software
Library Automation	OPAC	OPAC
Networking	Networking and Resource Sharing	Networking and Resource Sharing
Digital Libraries	Cataloging electronic resources	Overview of Digital Libraries
Electronic Information Searching	Online database searching	Information Access in an Electronic Environment
Selected Management Issues	Collection Development and Management	Teamwork in Libraries

Incentive Preference

Both groups of respondents felt that the incentive that was the least appealing to academic librarians was consideration in promotion evaluation. The library directors felt that the institution “giving release time and expenses” was the most appealing incentive, while the librarians thought that the most appealing incentive for continuing education was the opportunity for professional growth. This clearly indicates that the librarians realize the importance of professional growth in librarianship. There is no doubt that changing technology and the role of libraries in college and university environment demand that professional librarians, as well as other library staff, to stay abreast of all changes in technology. Many studies support the needs for continuing education of librarianship. Otto (1979) predicted that regular participation in continuing education activities would be required of academic librarians in the year 2000. Newman (1991, 41) stated the need for continuing education of the librarians and emphasized “the subject of continuing education and staff development of librarians are no longer a debatable topic”.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to the evidence that librarianship is a life-long learning process, involving both formal and informal methods of education. Library schools or other library agencies or providers such as library associations and organizations need to provide a variety of continuing education options, which librarians can use in a life-long learning process. Some tentative conclusions can be drawn for providing continuing education to academic librarians in the Southern Thailand.

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Overall, the findings indicate that there are five topics for continuing education that needed to be immediately provided by any continuing education providers to academic librarians in the Southern Thailand. They are (1) Overview of the Internet, (2) Library Automation (Cataloging), (3) Library Automation (OPAC), (4) Library Automation (Acquisition/Fund Management).

Other topics that are strongly recommended to be provided for academic librarians via continuing education are Library Automation (Serials), Networking and Resource Sharing, Information Access in an Electronic Environment, Internet: Issues and Responsibilities, Networking Technologies, Online Database Searching, Overview of Digital Libraries, Collection Development and Management, Teamwork in Libraries, Evaluation of Systems and Services, User Education, and Internet Security. Other topics that are needed by academic librarians in the South are Creating a Virtual Tour of the Library, Word Processing Software, Presentation Software, and Cataloging Electronic Resources.

The preferred location for continuing education is in a university or a college. Monday through Friday in the summer time is the time preference. The duration of time preferred is two to three days. The time frame can be longer, dependent on the continuing education subject. The incentive for participating in continuing education from the librarians' perspectives is the opportunity for professional growth, whereas from the directors' perspectives, the incentive is in the form of time release and expenses given by the institution giving. The findings give essential information for administrators in managing continuing education for academic librarians in Southern Thailand. Professional development of librarians is one that is extremely important for the present and future growth of academic libraries.

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